

MERELY
A
NEGRESS

BY
STUART
YOUNG



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A WEST AFRICAN STORY

By
Stuart Young



London
John Long
13 and 14 Norris Street, Haymarket
1904

DEDICATED TO
JOHN HOPE, ESQ.
OF MANCHESTER AND OF CONGLETON

IN APPRECIATION OF THE MANY KINDNESSES
RECEIVED AT HIS HANDS
DURING MY STAY IN
GRAND BASSA

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CHAPTER I

UNREST

“ We are our own devils. We drive ourselves out of our Edens ”

THE sun stood proudly above the docks on a beautiful morning in June, 19—, and the light was dappling the river with opalescent tints. Liverpool was at her busiest period, for this was the height of the West African season, and the steamers were running on an augmented service. Cabs were rattling up to the landing-stages, passengers were hurrying along the gangways, and everywhere was the multitudinous murmur of traffic.

When Frank Benson arrived at the Toxteth Dock there were three of the Elder-Dempster boats in process of discharging cargo. He never visited Liverpool without calling at this favourite haunt of business men. After the comparative sleepiness of his little Manchester suburb the effect of this ceaseless activity was revivifying, renascent, strengthening.

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The plain truth was that he had ever been instinct with life, and loved above all things to see the rush and hurry of commerce. As yet the proper course of trade had not commenced, but Benson was supremely satisfied. He passed slowly down the length of the dock, now and again exchanging a nod with an acquaintance. Presently he was aroused to a keener interest in the steamer under survey by the sight of a little heap of ivories. He paused incredulously, for this was a Northward Windward boat, and tusks were an unusual kind of produce to arrive from that part of the African coast.

“Well, Benson, old boy, how are you? Nice little lot, aren’t they?”

He turned and looked upon the speaker, a brisk, handsome man of about thirty-five. Evidently he had prospered in his calling, for his every movement indicated success. Benson recognised him immediately as the manager of a large firm of Manchester shippers. They were members of the one club, and slightly more than speaking acquaintances. He held out his hand frankly.

“Yes, indeed, Denley. From your house at Grand Bassa, I suppose?”

“Our agent picked them up somewhere in the interior. You have never had any big game shooting, have you, Benson?”

There was something of the traveller’s pity for the stay-at-home in his voice, and the younger man felt himself more than interested.

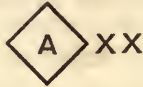
“You have visited the West Coast?” he asked.

Denley laughed. “Fourteen or fifteen times. There’s not a healthier place in all Africa than

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Liberia, where our houses are stationed. You will see our name on the greater part of the Bassa and Sinoe produce."

He pointed indifferently to about thirty casks of palm oil, and Benson saw that they were all marked



"Were you ever in Africa?" asked Denley, after a pause.

"No," replied Benson. "As you are no doubt aware, I have not indulged in travel overmuch. Paris and Berlin are the two most distant points of my journeyings."

"Just so. We are sending out a young fellow by the *Sobo* next week, and it is not anticipated that he will have to return home through sickness. Do you know, the greater part of this West African jargon about mortality is groundless? You might travel the whole world over and not see a fairer land than Liberia in the summer months: a sky that is never without a sun from early morning until seven at night, an ocean that is always blue and placid, and vegetation of the most luxurious growth. We haven't sent a man out to Grand Bassa yet who didn't ardently long for a return trip."

Benson was affected by Denley's enthusiasm more than he would have cared to admit. He turned away. Then remembering that he had not shaken hands with his friend, nor given him a word of farewell, he went back. "I will call in and see you at Fane Street some time," he said. Then he walked in the direction of the station.

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The town was awakening, and men with baskets in their hands were going to their work. A continuous current of cabs and hansoms, lorries and handcarts, flowed towards the docks. The drunken man of last night was lurching his erratic way homewards, and the day policemen were taking up their places at the street-corners.

As Frank Benson leaned back in his carriage he looked eagerly at the thronging platform. Three girls from the large jam factory at Aintree came swinging along, singing shrilly. They paused abruptly opposite his window, and one of them gave a gasp of consternation as she began to shake her loose apron. "I've gone an' lost them after all. An' me picked 'em specially for Teddy, that he might have a smell o' the medders." Her companions became restless. "Oh, hang the flowers! Come on, Aggie, we'll be late." The girl turned resolutely towards the station entrance. "You can go on," she cried truculently, "but I'm goin' back to Sefton Park to get my Teddy some buttercups. So there!" Rapid words and gesticulations were exchanged, and Aggie's voice continued its shrill expostulation from an increasing distance. A few seconds later she returned, her face flushed, and her mouth firmly set. In her hands were a straggled heap of buttercups and daisies. "I found them in my blouse," she said apologetically. The three girls linked arms again, and passed hurriedly down the side of the train. The sharp tones died away, and Frank turned to his papers.

He beguiled the forty-five minutes' journey between Liverpool and Manchester by a perusal of the *Mercury*. Passing down Market Street on his

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way to the car which was to carry him to his home at Eldon Green, he purchased a bunch of primroses, and gratefully inhaled their fragrance as the electric tram sped onward.

He reached home, and gave the flowers to his mother to place in water. Both his parents were alive, and he had not yet opened an establishment of his own. He was an only child, and his father had been with one of the large railway companies for many years. After he had partaken of a slight lunch, he turned to his mails. There were several proofs to correct, and a parcel of novels had just arrived from the *Observer's* office for review.

He turned to his printer's slips with a sigh of impatience. The first was of a short story written a few weeks previously in the fields. It seemed redolent of the scent of buttercups and the freshness of grasses. In it he had asserted that the grinding tumult of life was a senseless outcome of labour, and that a sufficiency of food and clothing, and liberty to enjoy the real things of existence, were to be desired more than opulence and power. In the whole realm of vital things but one was truly pleasurable—health, with its accompanying delight in the simple phenomena of nature.

The hero of the little idyll was a poet, and he sang extravagantly of the beauties of the earth. Benson smiled as he read the lines that had seemed so tangibly true to him a brief month before.

*"I will tell you the story of Rose.
In my garden the sweet flower grows
Strongly and gaily;
She sings to her mates 'mid the throng
A wondrously rapturous song
Hourly and daily.*

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- " *I am the Queen of the Flowers :
All reds and all whites may be ours,
 Watch ye the glory ;
On plainland and hill, or in dale,
We blush at the sun, or are pale
 At the moon's story.'*
- " *Then turning to others she spake
While bending athwart the green brake,
 Silent and shady,
' Look ! look at the skein of my dress,
Fragile in pure loveliness—
 Look at your lady.'*
- " *The tulip and lilac bent down,
And gazed at the red of her gown,
 Pale in their pride ;
The pansy and mimosa stooped,
While the wallflower wearily drooped
 Down to her side.*
- " *I watched the flower-play, and I smiled.
I wondered, and then I said, ' Child,
 You speak too clearly.
Oh, Rose, serene in your show
Of red and of green, yet I know
 One I love dearly.*
- " *Have you seen flowers of a white
So fresh and so pure and so bright
 That little eyes,
Not having cognition of sin,
Admiringly looking within
 Have seen paradise ?*
- " *True, Rose, that you bright are of hue,
And other flowers looking at you
 Falter ; and mere
Knowledge that men deem you sweet
Makes the violet droop at your feet
 Shedding a tear.*

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“*But the flower, gentle, timid, I sing
Is a tenderer, holier thing
On land, plain or hilly.
I praise most the bud of my breast,
The flower that is emblem of rest,
Lowly, sweet Lily.’*”

Benson finished off his proof, mechanically placed it in its return envelope, and put it on the mantelpiece ready for posting. He looked despairingly at the heap of books on the table. To-day he could do nothing more, he knew. He lifted up the novel that lay on the top and looked at the title. “The eternal Corelli!” he murmured. “I shall refuse to review it. How she has howled at me because of my criticism of *Ziska!*”

He put on his hat, took a spray of the primroses from the vase, and turned towards the fields.

It would be hard to say how Frank Benson had drifted into journalism. He had always been a lover of the byways of literature, and had early set up a school of his own. This selection would have greatly pleased the multitude of young writers whom he adored, but would have been inevitably condemned by a man of over forty years of age. The influence of these singers—bright, earnest, art-loving—was apparent in all his work. His was an organism that could not exist under the régime of hard-and-fast rules. Literature was a free field, and gave him the liberty for which he had always striven. Of fiction—though he read only in a desultory fashion—he knew a great deal, and there was hardly a living writer of whom he could not claim to have read one-third of his or her productions. Of dead novelists, dating back

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to Richardson, his information was even more adequate. He had commenced to write at the age of eighteen. Now, he was connected with one or two of the leading London reviews, and sedulously avoided the popular magazine press. The result of this was that his income had always been precarious, and at times became unsatisfactory. But he had indulgent parents, and his wants were few.

He was fairly popular with his companions, though he might have been more pleasing had he been content to drop his reserve. His sense of humour was great, but as it remained self-isolated his friends deemed him excessively serious. Only three small volumes had as yet been published by him, and these were kindly received. He determined to postpone a further effort until he was a few years older, although he had sufficient scattered materials to make a very presentable book. In figure he was tall and thinly built, and when people looked at his dark eyes they might have taken him for a genius. His conversation was generally slow, but at such times as passion moved him his voice proclaimed him as a man of potent humours. His age was twenty-three, and he remained at that psychologically restless period of life when eccentricity shows itself in unaccountable changes of mood.

CHAPTER II

A POSSIBLE REMEDY

“Stretching his hands out to catch the stars, man forgets the flowers at his feet”

BENSON was fond of his parents in an unusually high degree. He lacked that pessimism which has so long been a characteristic of town-bred young men. As yet he was not engaged, and woman's appearance became of little moment to him. He loved everything that was pleasing to the eye, and looked at a pretty girl in the same way that a connoisseur would gaze at a picture or a flower. But he had the reputation of being averse to female society, and nothing can be more killing to a man's social chances of success.

The greater part of his work he turned out at home in his rooms; but the next two days he spent at the newspaper offices in Cross Street reviewing the novels submitted to him.

Continually the sight of the flowers sold on the curbs of the streets reminded him of his desire for change. He admired the dull reverberation of the traffic, and he worked with open windows. The subdued murmur from the principal thoroughfares, prolonged, monotonous, rose to meet him from

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early morning until he closed his door at night. The steady diapason strain seemed indispensable to him from long use and remembrance; and yet the country, the sea, was calling him irresistibly away from the town.

He arrived home tired and fagged. His resolution regarding the novel of the lady who is so popular with the English masses he had kept. But there had been others equally as fatiguing to one of his æsthetic predilections, and his soul had sickened as he read the blatant small-talk chronicled in the dozen latest volumes from London.

There was much conversation over dinner between his father and mother regarding their annual holiday. It was proposed that they should visit Folkestone, and several times Mrs. Benson looked inquiringly at her son for an opinion.

"Daddy, I'm tired of the old places," he said. "Haven't we been to Folkestone before, three years ago?"

Mr. Benson's eyes twinkled behind his glasses. He was a man of just over fifty, ruddy, stout, and comfortable.

"My dear boy, what would you have? I read your story in the *Monitor* yesterday, and you speak eloquently enough of the charms of country life."

Benson slowly sipped his coffee.

"You don't understand. It is the old complaint. Do you remember the time that I went off on a walking expedition with Dick La Bannote? He was then at the same period of development as I am now, and he conceived the notion—fan-

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tastically be it owned—of looking for the fiancée whom he had not yet seen. I have got the identical fever in my blood, and feel as though I must go upon the same quest.”

Little Mrs. Benson looked anxiously at her son. She had often wished that he would settle down to matrimony, but she certainly expected to have some voice in the matter of selection.

“Life might be fairly satisfactory in town if one could have it all one’s own way,” continued Frank. “But this subservience to the caprice of my editors is wearing me out. Sooner or later I feel as though I shall either leave reviewing alone altogether or forsake my art in despair.”

Mr. Benson laughed outright.

“That is what I have been advising you to do for a long time, Frank. Manchester is at fault. Leave it for a time, and you will return thoroughly cured. Come now, let us all vegetate for a couple of months at some quiet country or seaside town, and during our holiday promise me that you will not use your pen.”

“Perhaps you are right, daddy. But it is not Manchester from which I want to escape. It is England. So long as I am within the coastline of this awfully advanced country, so long will I be hearing the latest literary gossip.”

“Try Paris,” said Mr. Benson sententiously, but Frank did not heed the interruption.

“What on earth does it matter to me whether this book has run into ten editions, or whether that is withdrawn for political reasons three weeks after publication? While England holds me I must—any one, man or woman, who has written for the

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press will understand why—interest myself in these things, simply because it is my duty. Outside Great Britain I shall be free.”

He had spoken with vehemence, and both Mr. and Mrs. Benson looked serious.

“What is in the wind, Frank?” asked the father, with the wisdom of long business experience. “You are not well, my boy,” said the mother anxiously.

“Let me be quite serious, daddy. And don’t be too upset at what I am going to say, dear mother,” said Frank after a long pause. “Being in Manchester, among busy men, I am compelled to live extravagantly. My club is indispensable to my local literary connection, and there are frequent visits to the theatres, public dinners, holidays, clothes. All these mean expense, and I am growingly conscious of the fact that I live outside my income. This is unfair to you, and I am determined to remove the encumbrance of my excesses from your shoulders.”

“My dear lad,” replied Mr. Benson kindly, “you exaggerate the case. One would think to hear you talk that you were earning nothing, and that we were bearing the whole of your expenses. And these you sadly overestimate. You are very frugal indeed, and I boast that my son is one of the most abstemious young men on the Manchester press.”

Benson rose from the table. His face had softened, and he laid his hand lovingly on his mother’s shoulder.

“I must go to the club to-night. We will talk again to-morrow. We have Maclaren down on a

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lecturing tour, and it will be a big occasion at Princess Street."

The moon was shining brightly as he walked along the side of the Green. A shower had broken the splendour of the afternoon, and now the roads glistened with patches of silver. He could not forget his story of the fields. Still the lines—

*"I praise most the bud of my breast,
The flower that is emblem of rest,"*

ran through his mind like a refrain. He looked at the huge buildings on either side of him. The moon had flecked the parapets and sills with white, but they seemed to Benson to be of stern height and threatening appearance. He admitted to himself reluctantly that he was tired of the city. This knowledge only served to disquiet him. How long would the mood last? He wondered what he should do away from his home, his parents, his associates, his beloved friends. As he walked steadily towards the centre of the town he constantly murmured a few favourite lines from Stephen Phillips :—

*"Remember how on the warm beach we sat
By the old barque, and in the smell of tar ;
While the full ocean on the pebbles dropped,
And in our ears the intimate low wind
Of noon, that breathing from some ancient place,
Blew on us merest sleep and pungent youth."*

How those verses haunted him ! The smell of tar and the sound of the ocean, with the wind rippling gaily by ! That was what he wanted—the

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shore, the coast, the sea. He must get away from the town, abandon this incessant round of duties, and seek the natural solitudes of life. He must go to some place where men live simply, face to face with the phenomena of created things. And why not Liberia? If he desired to write there he could do so, quietly, restfully. In any case it would be a change from his present sordid career.

He had resolved upon the place with sudden instinct; but now he recognised the fact that somewhere in the under-chambers of his mind his destination had been irrevocably fixed since the hour in which he met Denley in Liverpool. Other people had visited the West Coast of Africa, and returned to England strong and well. Why shouldn't he? In Grand Bassa he would have the sea always with him, and flowers and greenness everywhere. For him, observer of human nature in all its varied aspects, no place could be better fitted. If the trial proved a failure he could always come home and recuperate, finally returning to his position on the local press.

When he reached the club he immediately sought the library, and wrote impetuously to Denley, proffering his services at a nominal salary. The assembly room was crowded with visitors, and he did not wish to commence a search for his friend. He listened for a time to the lecturer, and then entered the smoking-apartment. It was remarked that he had rarely been in such excellent spirits before.

During the next few days he was very busy. From the firm at Fane Street he received a ready

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acceptance of his offer, and it was urged that he should be prepared to sail with Arthur Clayton, their new assistant, by the *Sobo*, on the following Saturday.

Mrs. Benson was tearful, and Mr. Benson did not fully approve. But Frank had never been in the habit of announcing his movements long in advance. His reputation for eccentricity was fully maintained now. He advised all his publishers of his departure for "West Africa," but he did not explain his intentions to any one of them.

He had to pack his trunks and make special purchases from the warehouses. The majority of his belongings he left behind, and at the bottom of his largest box he only placed such books as he intimately cared for. There were half a dozen novels, two or three volumes of verse, and his own rough manuscripts. A few nick-nacks in porcelain, a dozen or more photos, and a couple of his boyish paintings he particularly reserved. His other possessions he left without the slightest feeling of pain.

Finally he took his favourite walks, enjoying acutely the recollections that thronged around him at each beloved spot. From the tops of the cars he looked fondly at the old familiar places, and his face beamed as he realised that he was going away to a simpler life. It was only now that he was on the point of leaving civilisation behind him that he realised the splendour of his native town. The early morning sun was shining, and the roofs of the great buildings were faintly tinged with rosy fire. The streets were beginning to fill. The

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animation of the open air—the sentient panorama that covers the tragedy and comedy of life—was around him, and he became sharply interested in the most trivial incidents. He could not wonder that men were enthralled with the stupendous events of the cities; but he sighed contentedly as he thought that to-morrow morning his trial of change would begin.

Very wisely he bade his parents “good-bye” at the door of his home. This had been his own dictate. Mrs. Benson was almost prostrated with grief at the parting, but she was sustained somewhat by her husband’s cheery optimism. “We shall have the lad home again soon, bright and well,” he declared. He shook Frank’s hand heartily at the door of the hansom after his luggage had been safely deposited on the roof, and supported his wife into the house. A little knot of people stood at the corner of the street, and wished him a hearty “God speed.” Frank’s eyes were dim with tears.

As he drove to the station he kept a brisk look-out on the streets. There was the interminable noise of wheels, the sharp clack of voices, the ceaseless clamour of life. He got into the train almost mechanically. To the porter who labelled his luggage, and hoped that the Coast would agree with his health, he felt almost grateful. In Liverpool, impelled onward to the docks, he saw the same excited crowds, the same busy rush. He turned to a magazine for relief, and was glad when the cab stopped at the Prince’s landing-stage.

The Mersey was veiled in a grey mist, and out

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of it the *Sobo* came like a huge phantom ship. There was a delicious coolness in the atmosphere, and the sun would shortly dispel the vapours. Benson drew in the breeze in gusts; and almost resented the appearance of his fellow-traveller near the gangway. He was about the same age, but of ordinary appearance and apparently imbued with a sense of his own importance. His boxes were marked conspicuously in white paint "A. C.," and he introduced himself by name to Benson as "Clayton of Longsight. Glad to meet you, old boy, and hope we'll pull together all right. First time on the Coast? Same here. But I'll get through and have a good time, I'll be bound."

As the sun shone royally over the city the water showed up more clearly. Amid the noise and rush of departing people Benson had his luggage carried on board. Clayton's friends were largely in evidence, bidding him farewell, so Frank went below to view his cabin. Everything moved. The stewards were passing busily from corridor to corridor. Benson thrilled with excitement at the scene around him. He felt supremely happy.

Presently the captain's stentorian voice cried out that friends must go ashore, and there was a rush for the gangways. Just then Denley appeared. He had been delayed, he said, in Manchester, but wished to give his young friends a parting word. "Keep your health, Benson, my boy, and don't fail to write regularly," he cried, as the anchors clattered at their chains. There was a scarcely perceptible movement. The engines throbbed; and gradually

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the steamer made her way through the river into the open sea. Benson's eyes to the last were fixed on the fast receding shore ; and when the land line had disappeared into the misty horizon, he turned away from the deck-rail with a sigh.

CHAPTER III

THE OPTIMISM OF YOUTH

“It is restful to find a centre around which enthusiasm, youth, and pleasure can group themselves”

Written from Grand Canary and Sierra Leone

“MY DEAR FATHER AND MOTHER,

“In accordance with my promise, I now have delight in working up the miscellaneous information collected during the last fortnight. We are to be at the Islands for a couple of days, so I intend, after an examination of my environs, to keep my room in the hotel, and elaborate, for your edification, the rough notes taken from day to day since the 4th instant.

“It is now seven o'clock in the morning, and except for the intervals of meals, I mean to stick to this pen until the evening, when in the quiet of the gloaming I shall examine the claims to the affection and regard of visitors of Grand Canary.

“Then I shall put myself to bed, beneath the mosquito curtain, and dream of Home, Sweet Home.

“Captain Holgate was right in promising that we should have good weather. Our first afternoon was fresh and sweet. What a fine sight the docks of Liverpool made from the swiftly receding ship!

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White handkerchiefs could be seen waving amid the moving panorama of the ships and the boats ; and try as I would, I couldn't keep the lump from rising to my throat, as I gave my last look for so many months on the dear old country that gave me birth. What a roar and deep-sounding boom the docks had been giving off for the last two hours ! But now as we crossed the Bar the noise calmed down into a languorous murmur, and then finally died away.

“And now having said ‘good-bye’ to Lancashire, I turned my attention to the ship. Contrary to my expectation, its 5,200 tons made only a very modest appearance. Nevertheless, it was a grand vessel, redolent of comfort, and fitted up in the best style. My berth was in a very good position, and my cabin was shared by Mr. Clayton. I have kept a rough diary throughout, and will briefly run over the events. In the meantime, let me tersely describe the routine of the ship. Don't, pray, for one moment think that my days have been entirely given over to idleness, for I have been on the alert all the time, and have collected some valuable facts regarding the life I am (God willing !) to lead until my call comes for home and mother-country. Coffee is supplied in the saloon every morning between 6.30 and 7. I never went for this, but I was always called at seven o'clock for a sea-water (cold) bath. I found these ablutions very helpful and healthy, and the doctor recommends me to continue them.

“Sometimes after the bath I would dress and walk the deck for an hour. More frequently I returned to bed and rested—not sleeping—until eight o'clock,

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at which hour a bugler called us by a loud blast from the hurricane deck. Breakfast at 8.30 ; lunch at 1 ; a cup of tea (very refreshing) at 4 ; and dinner at 7. The electric light is turned off in the cabin at 10.30 each night ; and after dinner I usually sat on deck in a comfortable chair, chatting with an acquaintance.

“We had only one bad night, and that was on Thursday last. As we steamed down the Irish Sea and entered the English Channel, the weather was what the second mate termed ‘just a trifle fresh.’ The *Sobo*, I found, was only on her second trip, and had not yet received her ‘christening’ at the hands of Father Neptune. She was evidently a very dry craft, for she vaulted the waves in fine style, and rose over the foam like a kite.

“I soon grew accustomed to the régime of meals, and well within the first week had become familiar with ‘all the great ones of the earth’—or the sea ; which is it, pray ? Goodness ! What with concerts and balls, I hardly knew whether I stood on my head or my heels. One of the passengers was the—please get ready for the title—Honourable Colonel Scott Russell, and another was a black potentate of the coast, at whose very wink the kruboyas tremble and the Yorubas faint.

“My waltzing never was very great, but some of the ladies soon found me out, and if the dancing wasn’t altogether satisfactory, the *tête-à-tête* afterwards invariably was.

“And here let me say a few words about the passengers whom we had on board the *Sobo*. The black prince mentioned aforetime was accompanied by his secretary—also a native—whose manners

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were immaculate, and who occupied the same cabin as his chief. Then there was a black lady, bound for Lagos, who spoke to me very kindly several times. Most interesting of all were three honeymoon couples, bound for Grand Canary. Their enthusiasm for each other's company, and their extreme exclusiveness from intrusion, gave the game away at once. They were wont to pace about upon the hurricane deck when the moon,

'Pale pilgrim of the night,'

came out upon her nightly vigil.

"Perhaps the most delightful meal of the day was dinner. We had each an appointed place, and, therefore, I invariably had the same *vis-à-vis*. Opposite were a young lieutenant and his wife, a pretty girl of not more than twenty-three. This gentleman's conversation was very entertaining, and his wife's witty repartee was quite epigrammatic. He had only been home from the war about six months, and was on his way to Sierra Leone, where he is now at his own station. He is to serve here for six years, on and off. He informed us—quite frankly and openly—that he had only been married a few months, and that his wife had determined to sacrifice the possibility of illness in order that she might be constantly by his side.

"What a gallant girl! I wonder how many there are of our modern society ladies who would brave the danger of a ruined complexion for love of a husband? What girl would sacrifice the joys and pleasures of civilised intercourse to spend her time with humble me amid the ignorances and the superstitions of the blacks?"

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“And this gentleman’s talk was highly instructive too. I loved to turn the current of his thoughts upon the recent war, and glean items relating to the character of the Boers.

“Peculiarly enough, he referred to them in terms of great tolerance, and declared that they had always treated him with cordiality and respect. He spent last Christmas Eve with an old-established family whose house was near his outposts, and his companions organised all the ancient English customs they could think of. A yule-log was lit, and they played ‘Postman’s Knock,’ ‘Hunt the Slipper,’ etc., *ad libitum*. He said that the Boers were greatly pleased, and entered into the games with much zest. Most touching of all was the following event, and he recorded the fact with evident feeling. At the close of the festivities, when the morning sun was melting the grey mists of Christmas Day, a little native girl was placed upon the table, and sang in a clear, sweet voice our National Anthem, ‘God Save the King.’

“Lieutenant Phelan avowed that he took this as the most delicate compliment they could possibly have rendered to his men, and in recognition of their loyalty he sang the Boer native hymn. He laughingly announced to us that he only knew the tune and a word here and there, being further utterly unaware of their meaning. But, with a twinkle in his eye, he said that what was lacking in musical expression was amply atoned for by his men in volume and vigour of sound!

“Of the second-class saloon I saw a great deal. There were five Welshmen bound for the Gold Coast, at which place they expected to make their

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fortunes. Like the majority of the inhabitants of hilly Wales, they had fine tenor voices, and made an admirable quintette for the singing of Welsh harmonies, and they were greatly in demand at the concerts. Then there were eight engineers of the Army Staff, journeying to Lagos. Their colonel was one of our first-class passengers, and a smart, manly soldier.

“Mr. Denley’s black boy ‘Coffee’ travelled in the second saloon. Of course, I have cultivated his acquaintance. He is a bright, intelligent lad, and promises to be a faithful servant and friend. For his pleasure I have played several games of chess with him, and he is quite an expert at this and all other similar pastimes. You should just see him playing ping-pong!

“‘Me like England,’ he says. ‘It is so full of nice people. You are kind to Coffee, and Coffee like white massa who is kind to him.’ Unfortunately, he is Mr. Denley’s personal valet, but my superior has lent him to me during the time of my stay in Liberia.

“You would really be surprised how the time flies on board. If you do not work (or play) the hours naturally drag, but if you are determined to be useful and pleasant to your fellows, and keep all the faculties on the alert for the collection of sundry observations, it is night before you have done one half of what you had intended. All the passengers on board the *Sobo* were bright, sparkling people, or, at least, I thought them so, and that is the same thing. They were happy themselves, and determined to make everybody else happy; so what more could one desire?

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“I have had some excellent pistol practice during the last fortnight, and am becoming quite a capable shot. Upon principle, I would not aim at sea-gulls: innocent enough birds, who have as much right to live as I or any other living thing. But I have killed about seven whisky bottles, which, by the way, is a record worthy of the notice of the Total Abstinence League! What say you? All the great men on board (excluding myself, who daren't publicly lay claim to the adjective) had claret or whisky at dinner, and the stewards made me a free present of the empty bottles. I used to cork them tightly, then fling them overboard. Immediately they were dancing away on the waves, and after a few shots I ultimately perforated the glass, which then sank. Admirable practice, and (thank the powers) innocent enough too.

“Perhaps my happiest hours have been spent ‘farrard’ and ‘aft.’ (Don't be afraid: that is seaman's English.) After dinner I would carry a deck-chair on to the larboard, and sit there in the moonlight, watching the witching glamour of silvery light on the waves, until warned by the bell to retire.

“*Later.*—On this particular evening we have had our fourth concert. Good talent was on board, and we heard some excellent songs. Other concerts have been organised since then, and by the time we reach Sierra (to-morrow) we promise to become a very merry and friendly party. We two pilgrims—Clayton and myself—will have to disembark here, while the other passengers, bound for other large towns on the coast, continue their journey on the *Sobo*. Here we may remain a couple of days

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waiting for the *Angola*, which will carry us to Grand Bassa. I shall be glad when I am at the end of my passage. A sea voyage, I should imagine, is an excellent tonic; but really, you know, one can have so much sugar that the sweetness cloys. As Solomon sagely remarks, 'A full soul despiseth an honeycomb.'

"The world never seemed so terribly large as it has done since I journeyed hither. I dare hardly think of the many, many miles (over three thousand already) that lie between us. But hoots! what's the odds so long as we can keep up an unbroken chain of intercourse? After all, 'absence makes the heart grow fonder.'

"The captain sang two songs for us at one of the concerts, and accompanied the choruses with a cross between a Highland fling and a French can-can. If you can imagine a sixteen-stone dancer on a rolling ship, pray do so. My poor fragile nib utterly refuses to bear the strain of description, and the reminiscence of the humour and pathos of that particular night is so strong upon me that I can hardly write for laughing.

"And, by the way, let me remark that laughing is very fatiguing work here. The sun is blazing into this room as though it mistook me for a kettle of water which required boiling without further delay. Think of 130 in the shade, and then conceive the colour of my hands and face! If I were pale in gelid Manchester, I am like a boiled lobster here for colour. Yet (thank God!) I feel that I can stand it; so, what's the weep?

"I was literally astounded at the mass of useful matter that can be acquired on board an African

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vessel. It is on board these steamers that the beginner meets the old coaster, and from him receives hints which are priceless. These men talk things over during meals, and the result is that I knew Sierra Leone long before I hailed it on the far horizon.

“I wrote you a short note from Las Palmas, which I hope you received safely. My mind is eagerly clamouring to describe the happy day I spent there, so I will commence straightway.

“We had been told on Thursday night, the 9th inst., that we should sight the Canary Isles before the dawn, so my love of the beautiful immediately cried aloud for a hearing. I remained on deck, nicely ensconced in a comfortable deck-chair, awaiting the break o’ day.

“My pencil has maybe lost a little of its facility of description during the last two years, owing to my negligence in literary matters; but I really must essay to limn the beauty of the picture which the grey dawn revealed. For many hours I had been waiting, waiting, waiting, surrounded by the densest gloom, and when at last a faint heliotrope film rose slowly upward from the sea, I gave a sigh of satisfaction, for I knew that the dawn had come at last. Only a mile or so ahead I could see the dim outline of the hills of Las Palmas, wrapped in a fleecy cloud of vapour. As the sun appeared this gradually melted away, and the black of the peaks changed to a faint yellowy tinge. Then suddenly, so silently and swiftly that the transformation appeared to be almost instantaneous, the yellow changed to amber, the amber to rose, and the rose to the golden glory of a summer morning.

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“And then in all the splendour of its verdure appeared the pretty island of the sea. The grass could be seen covering the slope of the hills, darker than that seen in England, and lacking somewhat of its dewy freshness, but nevertheless abundant and rich. Feathery palms threw high their heads to the tender sky, and above the varicoloured, antique houses on the slope of the valley appeared the purple of the mountains, their summits tinged with opal fire.

“After witnessing this glorious dawn I descended to my cabin for a wash, and when I came on deck again I saw a sight worthy of the brush of Luke Fildes. Such noise, and hurry, and bustle! And such colour!

“*Up in the darksome North
Pinched is the day and pale;
Never a bud looks forth,
Nor a nightingale.
Passion and joy and song
Home in the golden South,
Where the flowers and the men are young,
Where the world has youth.*”

(Mrs. Hinkson will forgive the misquotation.)

“Oh! the pretty children! Eyes like stars, and complexions like a rich damask rose. The hair is generally a rich black; but occasionally you see a curly head of ripe auburn, flushed here and there into a delicate red—an effect which is really wonderful.

“We had anchored about a quarter of a mile from the shore, and the ship was surrounded with boats, full of merchandise. In some of these small barques were naked little fellows of anything be-

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tween the ages of seven and sixteen, the morning sun flashing upon their brown backs.

“‘Throw sissipence in ze water, and me dive for it.’

“‘Gimme threepence, sare.’ It was a sight worth travelling to see. If a coin were flung into the water, the bodies flashed from the side of each respective boat, and in a few seconds one would triumphantly return with the sixpence in his mouth. The water is peculiarly translucent—quite pellucid in fact—and the passengers could follow the course of their passage under the surface.

“But we were anxious to get ashore in order to explore the islands, so for the moderate fee of one shilling per head we were rowed to land. Here we hailed a vehicle, something like an English trap, covered with an awning. After a rather heated negotiation the driver agreed to take six of us round the islands for £1. This worked out at three shillings and fourpence per head, so we couldn’t grumble, could we?

“Let me describe Las Palmas later on, as it was the place from which we sailed. For a special fee we were able to run to Teneriffe, and of this place I shall endeavour to say as much as I can, although I was there only a very short time. As you approach it the island presents a revelation of miraculous beauty. Before you loom peak beyond peak of mountains, deep ravines showing darkly in their midst, while at the highest altitude emerges the snow-capped summit of the Teide.

“A little pier shoots out into the sea, flecked with the dusty sails of the small home vessels. But when you finally reach the land you are sadly

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disappointed. From the distance you had thought the city a marvel of granite and carved stone. What you see is a vulgar little town. But the picturesque squalor amply atones for the first revulsion of feeling. With all his many faults the Southerner is a creature to admire.

“The names of the streets are like a breath of paradise, but the stuffy little alleys are not enchanting places. ‘Calle de la Luz’ and ‘Calle de la Cruz Verde’ are two typical examples. But, after all, why should we demand a higher degree of accuracy from these Spaniards than we demonstrate ourselves? ‘Paradise Alley’ and ‘Angel Meadow’ look enticing on paper; but the real things are, if anything, repellent.

“We don’t often hear good guitar-playing in England. I wonder what is the sorcery of this instrument? It sorely lacks melody, and contains more wood than is good for its health. Yet, as I heard it played here, by a dark-eyed girl of about nineteen, it seemed to thrill me to the soul. Spanish is a really musical language, and thanks to you, dear parents, I have inherited a good ‘grip’ in study; so that I am conversant with this pretty patois. Nimble fingers, and a hollow piece of wood, crossed by half a dozen wires, and a lovely mezzo-soprano voice! But, what dreams were called up by the harmonies!

“The people on these islands are very friendly. They will stop you, and give you a cheery greeting in their own language. I acted in the capacity of interpreter throughout, and my conversation seemed to be a magic key which opened every door. We were ushered into orchards and gardens, and heaps

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of fruit and flowers were pressed into our arms. We sat for nearly an hour in a lovely bower of carnations, roses, and heliotrope, encompassed by a group of smiling natives.

“I had to pay rather dearly for the little volume of views which I send herewith. But I was determined to demonstrate the beauty and verdure of Grand Canary in a way which would appeal to you all. Of Las Palmas I shall give you a short account now: English rule is more supreme here than at Teneriffe, and I can hardly rejoice in the fact. I am no profligate, but I cannot be so sordid as to see the commercial advantages of the position. To hear English clerks loudly declaiming in the square amid the lisped, languid, and musical vocabulary of the Spaniards seems—give me a strong adjective, please—simply *awful*. I love my ancient and native tongue, but the slang and commonplace repartee of these countrymen of mine at Las Palmas seems like a poisonous smell from a lovely flower.

“The cathedral is a grand building. I backed into the square, and gazed up at its ornamental front as though fascinated.

“‘My dear Benson, do let us get on,’ cried my companions, so I dragged myself away, with a long, backward glance.

“There was one discord in this lovely day, which had appeared to me like a glimpse of very heaven. This jar was a visit to the Courts of Justice and the Chamber of Relics. Murderers are strangled in Las Palmas by means of a steel collar like a vice, which is worked by the executioner from the back. Three men were waiting for death when

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we were in the Courts. The tragedy is public, and thousands flock to see the execution.

“The officer showed us various daggers and guns, stones and clubs, which had been preserved from the different crimes during the last few years, and in his eloquent language, rich with gesticulation, described the events. I was glad to reach the golden sunlight again, and breathe the fresh air of the streets. May God help those three poor men condemned to death!

“After leaving Grand Canary we steamed out into the Atlantic again, and commenced our journey down the coast. The average rate of our progress has been 310 miles in the twenty-four hours, so that you see we made great headway.

“It was hot at Las Palmas, but the heat increased rapidly as we approached the African continent. Now, it is what Rudyard Kipling would call ‘Hades distilled.’

“From the distance the province of Sierra Leone looks perfectly enchanting. I recognised it immediately the dawn revealed the shore, for, as already stated, I have been well coached by the old-time coasters.

“There before us lay the three large bays: the Kru, the English, and the Pirate. High above them loomed the mighty mountains, whose rumble and noise had decided Pedro do Centra, the discoverer of the land, to call the place Sierra Leone, or the Saws of the Lion.

“I have seen (and felt too!) a goodly number of insects since I arrived here. The atmosphere seems to literally swarm with winged creatures of

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abnormal size and repulsive appearance. But I will, no doubt, ultimately conquer my aversion from these parasites; and if insects are the only deterrents from a happy life on the coast, then I say—

'Let them come—

I'll meet them on their own made ground.'

“What do you think of this story, though? It was told to us over lunch the other day by a young Scotch gentleman, who has been at various places on the coast for several years.

“One night he had retired behind his mosquito net as usual. (You understand that all the beds have to be veiled in this way, don't you?) He had been asleep for nearly an hour when he was aroused by the sound of a falling glass. The light—a candle—was still burning, and by the dim radiance shed round the chamber by this homely electrolier he saw a milk-jug of moderate size marching towards him. You can just imagine his horror and astonishment. He seemed to be stricken with a dumb terror which was supernatural in its effect. The shadows lay dark in the corners of the room, and no motor power could be seen moving the jug. Gradually it approached. It was within a foot of the bed ere he could pluck up sufficient courage to throw aside his net and look at it closely. Stooping down fearfully, he touched the moving utensil, and the pressure of his hand knocked it over. And there underneath lay revealed the chief actor in this little domestic drama: a prodigious beetle, of such a size that it had been unable to extricate

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itself from the home which its inordinate curiosity had prompted it to enter.

“This story may need a trifle more than the proverbial pinch of salt in taking, but the fact cannot be denied that the insects here are of great size: almost big enough to warrant such a startling anecdote as the one just recorded.

“But, after all, I think that the West Coast, like His Supreme Majesty Satan the Only, is not so black as some folk would represent. Trust me, I will make the best of it, and educate myself for all I am worth. Perhaps I was sent here for a great purpose, for if I can cope with the task, around me lies material for a life's work.

“Dearest, dearest love,

“FRANK.”

CHAPTER IV

THE FIRST TASTE

“You will find life full of sweet savour if you do not expect from it what it cannot give”

FRANK was not pleased with Freetown, Sierra Leone. At the hotel, antiquated, primitive, comfortless, he breakfasted with Clayton, who expressed himself forcibly upon the point of his dissatisfaction. A few days' delay was inevitable. The *Angola*, a steamship with a registration of about 3,000 tons, was a cargo boat, heavily burdened with iron for the new railway. It would be Monday before Captain Naler prepared to sail. The sight of other steamers in the harbour, panting hurriedly past after the despatch of their mailbags, increased the young men's impatience to be gone. They longed for the *Angola* to depart in order that they might hasten their voyage from what both had named as a pestilential atmosphere.

Clayton was greatly displeased. He had done nothing but rail since the anchor had been weighed at Liverpool. Benson, picturesque-loving and original, was compelled several times to advise a more optimistic outlook.

It was over dinner one evening that Frank

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received his first insight into the tragedy of the side issues of coast life. Several of the white clerks from one of the large English stores had called in to dine at his request.

"Ye gods! how slow it is here!" exclaimed Clayton, with a yawn, as he sipped his Chartreuse.

"You must cultivate the acquaintance of the ladies when you arrive in Bassa, old boy," said Taylor, the most flippant of the visitors. "It is the only thing that makes life worth living on the West Coast. I have heard it said that the girls of Liberia are unusually pretty—for negresses. I know that the ones in Sierra Leone are just delightful."

Clayton's face assumed a more animated appearance. The young clerk laughed heartily. He turned to one of his companions—

"Down in Lagos last year I had a jolly little native girl. I was with McIvers at the time. The place is quite different from what you would imagine—grey and dusty and dim. There is plenty of life and movement, but it is of a really depressing kind. The women, however, are bright and sparkling. This little girl of whom I am speaking followed me on to the steamer, and declared that she would commit suicide if I didn't take her to England. Such a ridiculous demand, you know!"

There was a laugh in which Frank did not join.

"Any child?" asked Finlay of the Coaling Company carelessly.

"Yes. She swore it was mine exclusively; and I'm inclined to think that she spoke the truth."

He patted Clayton on the shoulder in friendly fashion.

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“A man with such physical charms as you possess might make countless conquests. It was only recently that an agent in Monrovia—wasn't it Monrovia, Finlay?—attempted to shoot his English wife because he preferred one of the local Liberian women.”

Benson was conscious of a feeling of intense irritation at the turn the conversation had taken. After the wine had been removed he sat at the window and gazed out into the blackness of the night. The insects kept up their endless humming, and far below the bull-frogs were rendering a dismal chorus.

The *Angola* lifted her blue-peter early on Monday morning, and he cheerfully paid the exorbitant bill presented by the Dutch proprietor of the hotel. What luggage the two men had brought ashore was taken on board again as quickly as practicable, and the steamer pursued her course. At Monrovia, the capital of Liberia, she remained a day discharging her cargo. Clayton landed in a dug-out canoe, being curious and pleasure-fond; but Benson did not feel inclined to go ashore. He sat on the deck gazing idly at the busy mates as they conducted the discharge of the innumerable bales and cases. Grand Bassa was only sixty miles further down the coast, and the captain assured him that they would reach the harbour early in the morning of the next day.

Frank's first impressions of his new home were of gently undulating hills to the north and of a long reef of rocks to the south. The coastline appeared deliciously green, and was picked out here and there by the dazzlingly white roofs of

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factories. One of the firm's boats was there to row them ashore, and the kruboyes sang out their opinion of the new men as they lay back on their oars. The language was unintelligible to both, and their equanimity was in no way disturbed by the free reference to their peculiarities: "Massa Benson get long hair—him face fine—we like him much. Massa Clayton wear big collar—plenty rich—but no fine."

Mr. Wrigley, the agent, met them on the beach. He was a little wiry man with iron-grey whiskers all round his face. These took away a great part of his dignity; but his eyes were kind. He shook hands as though he meant to express a genuine pleasure. Frank determined to like him, and viewed the house with a natural and instinctive approval.

The Atlantic House was sturdily built upon a strong foundation of cement, and was supported by iron pillars. It looked as though it had been frequently altered and improved. Viewed from the front, it ran into unexpected corners and angles. A wide piazza faced the upper windows, and this jutted out near the dining-room doors into an open-air smoking apartment. The stores were underneath the house, and dainty offices with mullioned windows hung over the yard. There were four bedrooms, and as Benson looked at his luggage and anon surveyed the white walls, he felt thankful that he had carried with him some little tokens of home life. The yard was wide and spacious, and covered with a soft brown sand. A score or more of natives were laying out strands of fibre in rows of candid inexactness to dry in the sun. Near

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the outlying buildings were groups of Liberians, in European dress, talking volubly.

During the first few weeks of his residence in Bassa, Frank had a continuous sense of insecurity. Sometimes he would almost expect to see a black face reflected from his mirror, so used did he become to ebon skins. He liked the place, and soon grew to admire the people. They were very hospitable, and he found a little patch of garden round all the cottages. There were lilac and aloes, and everywhere the bush was starred with red and white blooms. The charm of the place seemed to obsess him, and years after his return to England he would find himself repeating snatches of verse that he had written—or left unwritten—on the shore and in the woods.

*“ Where the ocean strikes the beach
In one long, impassioned reach
Of surf: where rocks are each by each
Submerged, I lie
Wonderingly
Watching while the boats skim by.*

*“ Where the lighthouse proudly stands,
Wrought by patient, horny hands,
Where the ripples kiss the sands,
There I lie,—
Sea and sky
Locked in one harmoniously.*

*“ Breezes from the coastline rush,
Sobbing as they strike the bush,
Then anon to silence hush,
While I lie
Contentedly
Looking upward at the sky.*

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*“ Long lost memories arise,
Bringing tender melodies
And a mist before my eyes,
As I lie,
'Neath the sky,
Dreaming while the boats skim by.”*

He had not been in Grand Bassa two weeks before he began to know by name every one of the local people, Liberians and krumen, Vey and Bassa natives. Meantime, he and Clayton were thrown much together. They talked in the evenings on the piazza, and listened to each other with patience and some little show of admiration. Frank's pliant and artistic nature contrasted strongly with the egotism of the other man; but he gave more attention to Clayton's affairs than Clayton's selfishness would permit him to extend to Frank's. Benson was quiet, reserved, sympathetic; Clayton was loud, conceited, austere.

The journalist had taken over the duties of book-keeper and correspondent. Clayton was placed in the store in the capacity of assistant. He had early accepted the advice of his Sierra Leone acquaintances. Ere a month had passed he had founded his establishment. With the aid of a witch-doctor he bought a wife, paying the usual fee of one hundred dollars, a live bullock, and two tiger's teeth. To procure the latter articles occasioned him some little trouble, but he paid liberally for them. The result was that Samie, a Vey native, was in palpable evidence before the rains had passed.

Benson thoroughly disapproved; but he realised his inability to prevent this development. From

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the first Samie charmed him, and his love of the beautiful almost persuaded him to resent Clayton's possession of her body. For to her white husband she was never anything other than a plaything. And Clayton had left an English girl behind him in Manchester. With her he freely corresponded, and he assured Frank that he should marry her on his return. The journalist protested.

"Nonsense," declared the stores-clerk humorously. "You are much too scrupulous. Samie is a dear little thing, but she can never have a permanent place in my life."

"Doesn't she bore you at times? You do not know a word of Vey, and the girl cannot speak English."

"No. In her silence lies the charm. She never quarrels or argues with me."

Frank smiled. "She cannot talk about herself to you, that is true. On the other hand, she will listen while you talk about yourself. I daresay she keeps up an appearance of being interested in your conversation? At least she will never make stupid remarks, and I couldn't safely maintain that position for myself."

"And she can never say unkind things to me. She does not tell me of my failings, nor upbraid me because of my faults."

They laughed together. Then Frank said quite seriously, "Be good to the girl, Clayton. I can see the fascination of her presence for myself. When one is in sorrow or distress a silent companion who is sympathetic and gentle is to be preferred before a garrulous one. Men cannot bear clever women. And in the eyes of a woman the ideal man is not

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a genius. We love anything that is primitive and quaint. In Samie's ignorance of English lies one of her greatest charms."

Throughout the first few months of his stay in Grand Bassa, Benson saw very little of the black girl, for Clayton kept her in Veytown among her own people. But the frequent absences from the house, after business hours, of the young clerk, and his occasional references to her in conversation, were evidences of her existence and influence.

One day, about this time, Benson was sent into Buchanan, the more fashionable part of the town, to pay to the Government the duties on imported goods. The agent requested that he should call at the house of one of their most influential traders, and cultivate his acquaintance. As he walked along the path he watched everything with eager pleasure. He never tired of the beauties of the vegetation. A certain love of the original in his nature had endeared him to the hearts of Liberians and natives alike. He was greeted on every side as he strolled leisurely forward in the direction indicated by Mr. Wrigley. The sun was shining strongly, and a faint breeze stirred the trees.

He disposed of his task at the Treasury Department, and then set forth to find the house of Joseph Summerton. He made a few cursory inquiries, and the house was pointed out to him further down the road. There were flowers in every wayside garden, and he plucked a spray of blossom from an overhanging tree. Here and there he caught sight of a woolly head as a little one rushed precipitately into the house to call the attention of those inside. Bright black and

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brown faces were at almost all the doors, and he had the soul of a child as he continued his way.

The house of Joseph Summerton was a large zinc-roofed one, with neatly whitewashed walls and latticed windows. There were blossoms twining around the piazza, and stray buds in the garden. A huge palm sheltered it from the more ardent rays of the sun. He opened the little gate, and stepped across the enclosure on to a little path that led to the house. While he ascended the few stairs he was quick to note that the parlour was neatly furnished. A carpet was on the floor, and everything was beautifully clean. Two genuine oil-paintings hung over the dark oaken mantelpiece, and pretty vases were on the sideboard, full of lilies. He knocked at the door and waited. Then he heard light footsteps descending the stairs, and a sweet voice cried, "All right, mother. I'll go."

In another few seconds a girl appeared, and Frank guessed instinctively that she was a daughter of the house. She was pretty and young. He had never possessed a sister, so he was a poor judge of age; but he could not think her more than sixteen or seventeen. That there was negro blood in her veins he could not fail to observe, but he marvelled at the exquisite fairness of her skin. From experience he knew many Liberians to be nearly white, and this girl possessed a face that was almost thoroughly Caucasian. Her eyes were brown and soft, her lashes peculiarly long and dark, and her hair was of a silky black. This hung in long ripples around her shoulders, and her white dress was open at the throat. He spoke a few casual words, and her white teeth flashed at him several

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times. Her smile was intoxicating. She wore a sash of dark crimson round her waist, and her feet were bare.

"May I see Mr. Summerton?" asked Benson politely.

"Daddy is at the farm to-day; but he will be back in about half an hour. Do you want to see him? . . . Aren't you Mr. Benson from the English factory?"

"Yes," said Benson; "and I should like to see your father very much."

"You see, we hear all about the white people in Buchanan, even if we do not know them. I recognised at once that you were Mr. Benson and not Mr. Clayton."

"Why?" asked Frank, with a laugh.

"Oh! because you are so different from each other."

She paused with a blush. Her English was singularly pure, and Frank found himself looking at her wonderingly.

"But come round to the summer-house until daddy comes, and I will give you a cup of coffee."

She walked in front of him with easy grace, and Benson was again impressed with a sense of her extreme youth.

From the front the house looked on to the sea; at the back was a wide stretch of open country. Here among the flowers and the trees she gave him a dainty little repast. Benson asked himself what her name could be, and why Mrs. Summerton did not put in an appearance.

When the trader arrived he found them deep in conversation upon books and England, flowers and

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the locality. He was a fine old mulatto, slim, well-built, and keen-eyed. His hair was almost white, and his face was clean-shaven. The colour of his skin was a mid-brown, pleasant to behold and healthy in appearance. He looked rather blankly at Benson, but the girl quickly introduced him. Summerton smiled delightedly.

“I have heard great things of you,” he said, “and I should like to have you here for a few days. I must come down and see Wrigley. He promised to let me have a white man as pupil.”

Then he turned to the girl. “Is mother resting? You must make a friend of Mr. Benson.” He took Frank by the arm in a friendly manner. “I suppose you heard at the factory that I had a little daughter? Lily is well up to date, I can tell you, and is asking me all the time to take her to England. But I’m becoming too old for the journey now. You see, my mother was a Frenchwoman, and my wife’s family is connected with the same nation. Lily has the restless blood of white people in her veins, and see England she must, sooner or later.”

The girl looked humorously across at Benson. She was swinging along on the other side of the old trader, and her laughter rippled out in little snatches.

“Oh, daddy! don’t talk so much about it. I really believe it is your enthusiasm for white culture that has made me long so much to see the white man’s country.”

CHAPTER V

A CONVERSATION

“The highest and most profitable lesson is the true knowledge
and lowliest esteem of ourselves”

“**A**ND how do you like Grand Bassa, Mr. Benson?” asked Summerton, as they seated themselves on the piazza and looked out across the harbour.

“Very much,” replied Frank. But he found that the supply of superlatives, in which he had been indulging over the coffee, had sadly diminished now that he was not alone with the pretty Liberian girl.

“You are going to remain here some time I hope?” continued the trader.

“I believe so. I grew tired of the monotony of English town life, and I daresay that it may be a couple of years before I want to return. Besides, there is so much to interest one on the West Coast of Africa.”

There was a bustle in the upper part of the house, and a stout, elderly woman came down the stairs. “My wife,” said Summerton comprehensively. She had a motherly kind face, and was evidently fond of bright colours.

“This is Mr. Benson from the English factory, mother. He intends staying in Liberia a long time, he tells me. I know you will like each other.”

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She shook hands with him, and examined his appearance very carefully.

“Yes? You must give us a week-end some time, Mr. Benson. The house will easily accommodate you, and we are quite English in our tastes.”

He talked with them for a time, then rose to go. “Good-bye for the present,” he said to the hospitable trader and his wife. The girl accompanied him to the gate. As she unlatched it for him she said, “You won’t remain long in Grand Bassa, Mr. Benson.”

Frank looked at her vexedly. His intention to remain in Liberia for an indefinitely lengthy period had never seemed so strong as it did at the present moment.

“You don’t wish me to stay?” he asked. “I mean to stop here for a long, long time yet, I do assure you.”

The girl flashed him a glance of amazement. “I know what it is,” she said. “There are some men—Germans especially—who come here, and who remain for two, three, and even four years. But they are empty people who only live for profitable trading. You are different. A girl like me finds that time can drag, and I am sure you will yearn for the towns before long. If *I* feel cramped, who have never left Bassa, or seen large cities, what will it be to one who has lived in them from infancy?”

She paused with a blush at her own vehemence. Then she said earnestly, “It will be intolerable to you after another few months.”

Benson laughed. “You are wise, my dear child.”

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He saw that the word displeased her, and began to doubt whether he had not been wrong in his estimate of her age. More seriously he said, "It is just because I know what existence in town is like that I shall be eminently satisfied with Grand Bassa for a long time."

The girl's opinion was palpably the same. She closed the gate behind him carefully, and shook hands with him across it with a slight show of coldness. "Good-bye," she said. When Benson looked back after five minutes' journey down the path he could still see her white frock glimmering against the surrounding greenness.

It was quite dark when he reached the factory.

"Well," asked Mr. Wrigley, "what success?"

He was seated at the table, briskly working at the rough draft of his mails. Clayton had gone on one of his nightly walks, and Frank felt glad of the chance of a conversation with his agent.

"I like the family immensely, and Mr. Summer-ton seems to be remarkably well disposed towards the firm."

"He has been intimately connected with us for many years. We finance his piassava farm and share the net profits. You will need to see his manner of working in order that you may understand the production of fibre. Will you spend a few weeks there, and he can then take you to the farm?"

Mr. Wrigley showed a face all smiles. He knew that Benson was the most reliable assistant he could possibly have; and already he had discovered his worth in the systematic success that had followed his agency since the young journalist's

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abilities had been brought to bear upon the business.

Frank was pleased with the offer. "I will go with pleasure," he said.

"Right. I will send two of the boys down with your luggage this week-end."

The younger man lifted his eyebrows in surprise.

"It is all right, my dear fellow," Mr. Wrigley continued, with a breezy laugh. "Summerton and I have talked the matter over several times, and he is quite eager to be your host. He may be a little astonished at my sudden decision, but none the less pleased to have you, I know."

They waited for Clayton until nearly eight o'clock. Then, with a frown of annoyance, the agent ordered the stewards to pass the dinner. He was very reticent, and never abused a person in his absence. But it was obvious that he was becoming tired of the clerk's frequent disregard of rule.

Since the morning Frank's opinion of the gentle sex had greatly improved. The formality of the meal disquieted him. He felt that the circle of people in the house was incomplete. They lacked the presence of a womanly woman. Mrs. Wrigley had used to live at the Atlantic House, he had heard, and was now in England only temporarily. He mildly suggested his thoughts as he dalled with dessert.

"Oh," cried Mr. Wrigley, throwing a smile full of raillery across the table, "I believed you to be a woman-hater."

"No, sir; I am quite serious. What can equal the tact, the delicacy, and the sensitiveness of a

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lady? We are becoming far too prosaic and material in our outlook. Look at our dulness over meals. Were Mrs. Wrigley among us our talks would be more intelligent, more sparkling than they are now."

"You are speaking truly, my boy. It is quite a favourable theme with the newspapers at present that the genius of conversation is on the decline. A woman in our midst would help us considerably. I shall think the matter over, and write to my wife."

"Thank you, sir," said Frank gratefully. "To a certain extent there can be no doubt that the magazines are right in their assertions. A clever conversationalist chats for his hearers' sake—not for his own. And the end and aim of every talk should be to leave your companions pleased with themselves, and confident that they have satisfactorily impressed you with the vastness of their knowledge and experience."

The agent laughed.

"A convincing argument in favour of my wife's presence," he said. "But, seriously, Frank, I shall ask her to come to us. We shall be brighter and happier, I am sure."

As Benson turned towards his room he glanced at the table where Clayton usually worked after business hours. There were several letters ready for the coast steamer, and the top one was addressed, "Miss Fanny Leighton, Stockport Road, Manchester, England." Frank felt rather virtuous as he closed his door. "How mean the fellow is!" he thought. "Poor little Samie!"

The stars were brightening as he sat at the window and listened to the long, sonorous wash of

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the waves on the beach. He lingered over the blossoms with which his boy was wont to decorate his table, tenderly arranging the leaves. Then he murmured "Lily," and started as he recalled the prophetic lines of his poem—

*"I praise most the bud of my breast,
The flower that is emblem of rest,
Lowly sweet Lily."*

He repeated the words over and over almost unthinkingly. Then the full meaning of the words dawned upon his consciousness. He eagerly took up paper and pencil, and set to work upon a new inspiration.

He wrote slowly and carefully, pausing often to listen to the drone of the insects and the lonely cries from the bush. Clayton had returned, and was now moving about in the bedroom next to his. A kruboy, passing to his town, sent out a long, weird cry of parting to his friends some distance behind.

*"Wallflower, lilac, violet,
Pansy, mimosa, mignonette,
Coronella, tulip, broom,
Thyme and roses sweetly bloom.
O'er the hot sand in the sun
Tiny lizards bask and run,
For this is sure the fairest time
In the fairest land and fairest clime.*

*"How were the flowers born?' you say.
In the brightest garden on brightest day:
When the world was young, one sunny morn
Fresh and sweet was the violet born ;
Then the flowers of the jessamine
Glistened like stars through the mist white shine.
The snowdrop came with the hope of spring,
Pure as the plume from an angel's wing.*

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*The crocus was born, ruddy gold and white,
Then came hepatica and aconite ;
When the early winds had milder grown
The sward with daisies was thickly strown.
Buttercups came, near the hedges grew
Yellow primroses of sunniest hue.
Closely followed the anemones,
Then palm-flowers gleamed amid the trees.
Above the grass, so fresh and green,
Stately daffodils now were seen.
And on the purest day in all the year
A Lily was born—'twas you, my dear."*

Benson smiled with gratification as he pushed the sheets from him. He turned down the lamp and went to his bed. But the verses haunted him. He had merely been giving expression to the thoughts sent him earlier in the day, when the glimmer of a white dress had shown against the gloom behind Summerton's garden-gate.

He quoted the last verse in a whisper, and again smiled at the imagery of the lines. As he closed his eyes his thoughts were all of the morrow, and of what joy the next few weeks might produce for him. He admitted himself, for the first time in his sentimental life, to be in love, deeply, passionately, ardently.

CHAPTER VI

IDEAS

“Nothing can be better adapted to turn man’s thoughts off his own self-sufficiency than the works of Nature”

EARLY on the following Saturday morning Benson had his belongings removed to Buchanan; and at twelve o’clock he was standing on the stairs ready for departure. Clayton had made his jealousy ostensible for some weeks, and he now stood with contracted brows in the yard. His own steward approached him with a glass of water and proffered it respectfully. He was a Bassa native of about fourteen, clean, neat, and pleasing. Clayton turned on him with a suppressed curse, and the lad’s arm trembled. He stood in awe of his master. The glass clattered to the ground.

Then Clayton’s resentment found an outlet. He abused the lad roundly, and finally cuffed him across the head. “You little black beast,” he said.

Mr. Wrigley stood with Benson on the stairs. He made no comment upon the scene below, but his eyes were severe.

“Good-bye, Benson. I trust you will enjoy your stay at the farm. You must write to me

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occasionally. I shall manage to keep your work up to date for you."

Clayton grunted out a surly "Good morning" as the other young Englishman passed him. Frank felt relieved when he was fairly on his way.

Summerton met him at the little garden-gate, and chatted with him for a few minutes before they entered the house. When Lily came forward to greet him, as they passed through the flower-plots, he realised once more the charm of her brown eyes and white teeth.

"You will take tea with us? Or would you prefer it in your own room?" she asked demurely, as she laid the snowy cloth.

"With you," answered Benson promptly. "I want to be one of the family during the time of my visit, if you will permit me."

Summerton was evidently gratified. "I like that," he said heartily. "I don't care for a feeling of reserve to be constantly in the air; and you will be far more comfortable yourself, Mr. Benson."

From time to time Lily left the room with a flutter of white and crimson. "You are not sorry you came to Grand Bassa, are you?" the old trader asked during one of these absences.

"No, indeed. It is a respite after the clamours of London and Manchester."

"So. I cannot believe that this modern hurry is pleasing to God. When I lived in the West Indies I was always impressed with the sleepiness of the place, and used to contrast it with my memories of the rush and tumult of the large

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State cities. Here, too, I am quite content. I wouldn't exchange Liberia for any one of the European countries. True it is that we have our worries. Sometimes the piassava crop is spoiled by remaining in the water too long. Sometimes our kernels are unsatisfactory, and there's no end to the losses in the coffee. But 'tis good to live with nature, all the same—to live among the vegetation and to see the productions of one's own skill and labour. Ay, even though the old curse of Adam is on the soil still and there is nothing quite perfect. Often I have seen the most healthy crop of rice spoiled at the last moment. But, despite discouragement, I shall remain a farmer to the end."

"We all feel the happiness of production. It is the one recompense of endeavour. We bookmen see the result of our labours in a more tangible and enduring form than you tillers of the soil; but yours is the happier task."

Summerton looked his concern. He held all books in a degree of awe. "You really think that, Mr. Benson?" He laughed contentedly. "Well, I believe you are right; for I like to think that an old negro of the name of Summerton, quietly plodding away at his piassava farm, is influencing the markets of the world. And when I hear of the utility of the produce of Liberia, and the indispensability to Britain of the West African coast, I always remember that I am one of the pioneers of the trade."

"I like the story of the creation above all the rabbinical lore," said Frank musingly. "Perhaps Adam knew the surest felicity when he lived

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in the fields from day to day, and there were no towns in the world."

Then he went on to give an elaborate translation, in his own fanciful way, of the growth of nature in all its multitudinous aspects, and Summerton listened with all the negro's simplicity and love of the beautiful. Frank pictured the dewy mornings of the early creation, when the trees were young and tender and the angry clangour of the cities could not interrupt the singing of the birds; when the grass was fresh and green and the hurried feet of the surging millions had not marked it with their sordidness. How noble and grand must have been the fathers of the human race living constantly in touch with the Nature-God, and ever conscious of His loving presence! Summerton looked at his garden with renewed interest and acclaimed Benson's description. While they still talked Lily and Mrs. Summerton appeared, and behind them came three negro boys with the tea prettily spread on enamelled trays.

The four had tea together in the little parlour. The windows were open to let in the breeze that blew daintily from the sea, and there was the pleasant fragrance of greenery in the air.

A long line of natives was trooping past the windows, carrying each a bundle of fibre to the business part of the town. Benson ate his scones, and watched the panorama dreamily.

The "toting" or carrying qualities of the natives render them indispensable to the proper conduct of trade in Liberia. They perform the functions of beasts of burden with the strength and easy dexterity of a lifelong experience. A boy of ten

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years will carry on his head a bundle of piassava or a bag of palm kernels, weighing fifty pounds, with as much ease as a white lad would his school satchel. The districts north of Grand Bassa are covered in parts with steep hillocks. Conveying loads under which a mule would stagger, the natives go on unmoved for many hours. The diet of these carriers is similar in every respect to that of the average native: stockfish and rice, cassava and local fruits, rum and gin.

“The busy season will soon be upon us again, Mr. Benson,” said Summerton tentatively. Frank only nodded. From the road came a weird chorus. To stimulate themselves to fresh effort the negroes frequently indulge in a mournful chant as they monotonously tramp along the paths. Such a song the more distant boys had now struck up. Faintly carried on the wind, the tiny party of tea-drinkers heard the low murmur of their chant. This gathered volume as they advanced, until the full-sounding “*Oh ne wlu—deba oo*” was plainly audible. As the natives marched they kept up a rhythmic step, repeating a syllable or two jerkily, and then giving utterance to that peculiarly guttural sound which is the negro’s special acquirement. One of them appeared to act as solo; the others joined in the refrain of “*deba oo.*” The sound was appropriately pleasing, and in harmony with the stillness of the sultry afternoon.

Mrs. Summerton talked quietly, and her conversation was supplemented by many anecdotes and stories. The gossip was mostly of persons with whose names six months’ residence in the Republic had made Benson familiar; but it was generally

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harmless and good-humoured. Frank commented upon the song of the boys who had just passed, and asked for an interpretation. He had learned a great deal of the country language, but was frequently at a loss for the exact meaning of sentences heard by him.

“Oh, that chant is very simple, and is totally dissimilar from the usual expressions of the natives,” said Summerton, with a sparkle of his keen eyes. “It means, ‘Hear my song,’ and the refrain is, ‘Listen, do.’ There is a longer chant that I should like you to remember, ‘*Cam wle jagu o vlen be won.*’ The meaning is, ‘The production of fibre has made young and old financially equal’; and when you know Liberia a little better you will agree with me in saying that it is remarkably true.”

There were delicious scones and cakes on the table, and Frank thoroughly enjoyed the meal. Mrs. Summerton produced a pot of home-preserved pineapple, and his journalistic ability was instinct at once. He asked many questions, and she was delighted to answer them. Without knowing it, Benson had happened upon the entrance to Mrs. Summerton’s heart, and she looked at him approvingly as he ate his plate of fruit.

Lily was very quiet. She had not talked much since her greeting in the garden. When the table had been cleared she disappeared, and Frank heard her playing an organ in some distant chamber of the house. Mrs. Summerton had sent his boxes upstairs before his arrival, and now rose to show him to his room. It looked out upon the sea, and was somewhat barely furnished, but specklessly clean. He arranged his few volumes on a side-

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table, and was pleased to see a vase of roses in the window. "Lily," said the matron explanatively, "she says you are very fond of flowers."

For some time after her departure he was occupied with his papers, and upon pulling out his watch was surprised to see that it was nearly seven o'clock. Soon the dusk began to creep along the shore, and a boy brought him a glass of milk and a few biscuits. A second negro followed with a lamp. He heard the closing of the front door, the clear vibration of female voices from the further staircase, and then heavy footsteps on his landing. There came a knock to his door, and Summerton appeared on the threshold.

"I thought I would just look in to ask whether you were comfortable. We are early people here, but if you care to sit up you can please yourself. You will find breakfast ready any time after six in the morning."

Benson smiled. "I shall be between the sheets in another fifteen minutes. After all, late hours disturb the health on the coast, though I don't remember retiring before nine o'clock before. Thanks for your visit. I am very well satisfied. Good night."

He turned down his lamp, and a few minutes later was reviewing the events of the day as he lay on his bed. After the petty worries of the factory, he was glad of his respite, and determined to make the most of it. Beyond a casual poem and his leisurely work for the Liberian press, he had done nothing in his art since his arrival in Bassa. Perhaps the old delight in labour would come back to him now that the burden of dollars and cents

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had been lifted, albeit only temporarily, from his mind. He thought of the great electric-lighted city over in England, and mentally saw Eldon Green swathed in the mists of a December night. He heard the subdued murmur of the streets and the clack of voices. Then he listened to the grateful murmur of the sea beyond the garden, and with its music in his ears fell asleep.

CHAPTER VII

LEARNING NEW THINGS

“He that will have a cake out of the wheat must needs tarry
the grinding”

THERE is a little stream flowing through the upper part of Grand Bassa, which seems to reflect the quietude of that restful and sleepy place, so tepid is it in its flow, so overgrown with mangroves are its banks. The paths do not deign to recognise its authority, and it possesses no bridges. The traveller merely removes his shoes and wades across. Here on the banks of this river was Summerton's farm. Long after Frank Benson had been recalled to the factory his memories of Buchanan and the piassava farm were not confined so much to days as to a period of unalloyed happiness. The morning after his arrival at Summerton's house was exquisitely fresh, and the trader proposed that they should all spend the day at the farm, and thus early initiate Frank into the mysteries of fibre production. The young Englishman had made his visit at the most opportune time of the year, and he learned all the wonderful secrets of the growing acres. When first he saw the wide stretch of water, with the piassava like huge sticks of rhubarb growing from it, while the runnels kept up an incessant

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murmuring, he felt awed. He knew that he would require no occupation other than an observation of the cutting of the produce and its elaborate courses of cleaning and drying for many weeks to come. His daily excursions into the interior left him deliciously tired, and he returned home every evening to the whitewashed house at Buchanan full of talk and badinage. He had ample leisure for a pursuit of his profession, but he preferred to store his observations in his mind rather than place them on paper. The time would come when he would feel the grip of literature. Then he would labour assiduously. Meanwhile, even the few favourite volumes which he had carried with him from the Atlantic House remained untouched, and he had no desire to look at them. Every morning he was stirring about six o'clock, and he sought his bed soon after dinner each night.

For several days he was merely a beholder of the work, growing each day more familiar with the splitting and cleaning processes. The friendship between Summerton and himself steadily grew, and gradually he began to take part in the actual supervision. Had his future success depended upon his capacity for learning he could not have been a more eager student.

"Will I make a West Coast agent, do you think?" he asked the old negro one afternoon, after he had been splashing with bare feet from one heap of stalks to another.

"Rather," said Summerton forcibly. "I haven't known many young white people in Liberia who have cared to examine the practical side of these matters. You will be invaluable in the Liverpool

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markets a few months from now. Though you are town bred, the agricultural tendencies are in you. You haven't learned much yet, but you had the desire for improvement from the first."

Frank was satisfied with this attestation, and returned to Buchanan in high spirits. He was not making very rapid progress in his friendship with Lily. She was a busy little creature, and he was always occupied with his correspondence at such times as she had leisure. In the evenings she would be engaged with her mother in preparing the morrow's food, or at other times would be deeply engrossed in a new parcel of magazines and books from England. Her father's liberality in this department was boundless. Early in the mornings she would be occupied in the garden among the flowers.

After breakfast one mid-week Benson resolved to have a holiday. Summerton readily excused him, and started off for the farm alone. Lily was among the flowers with shears and pruning-knife. He laid down his cup and joined her.

"Cannot I help you, Lily?" he said. "You know how attached I am to flowers. Let me gather the blooms for the house, and then give me a lesson in pruning."

"This isn't the piassava farm, Mr. Benson. You look on very well there. I have watched you often. Look on now. Enjoy your holiday without labour."

"You do not explain yourself, Miss Summerton. Don't you know that a busy man can never be idle? Or perhaps it would be truer to say that an idle man occasionally delights in work. Which-

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ever of these two statements may please you best is immaterial to me. As you say, I have watched with admirable success. Now I want to operate."

"All right." She laughed at him shyly. "But be careful that you give the flowers sufficient stem, and only pluck buds that are maturely grown. If you don't properly understand which to pick you had better wait until I am ready to pluck them myself."

"I will both work and watch," said Benson, and he began to select roses and geranium blossoms. He placed the blooms loosely in a basin of fresh spring water, and carried them into the house. Mrs. Summerton had donned her outdoor clothes, and expressed her intention of going into the town for provisions. Soon Lily went to her room to change her dress, and reappeared in a dainty robe of lilac. Benson had his desired *tête-à-tête*, and Mrs. Summerton was hardly welcome when she returned two hours later.

The days that followed were full of pictures that impressed themselves vividly on Frank's mind. Summerton laughingly excused the young Englishman from the farm, and Lily, in her white frock and crimson sash, was his companion in everything. The months of the young year were different from the weeks just before Christmas. The mornings were grey and humid. Benson would open his windows to the cool sea air, and sit at his table watching the silver and sable of the ocean as it stretched illimitably to right and to left. Lily moved among her flowers like a little white ghost; and in the evenings she would take him to the

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room, half study, half nursery, where the organ stood, and sing quaint melodies in French and English.

He found the pretty Liberian girl more than interesting. From her manifest erudition he knew that she was considerably older than he had at first deemed her to be, but he still liked to think of her as a child. Her artless candour was infinitely amusing. From the first she gave him her confidence, and conversed with him about Manchester and London, Paris and Berlin, with an eagerness for information which was intensely flattering. He described his native country enthusiastically, and then talked of the British Museum, Downing Street, Fleet Street, the clubs. Her wonder grew as she listened, and he saw that his journey to Liberia was incomprehensible, beyond her understanding. Then he endeavoured to explain that the clamour of traffic could become tiring, oppressive, satiable. But she only shook her head at these times, and played "Sally in our Alley."

For the purpose of communicating with the outlying places on the coast, Summerton had purchased some years before a small whale-boat, and the two young people would often take a sail down the harbour. Four kruboyes were necessary to man the oars, and sometimes Frank would help to row. Then Lily would laugh at his love of exercise. The difference in years between them was so slight that they were like boy and girl together. Sometimes, when the wind gripped them, and the boat ran along impetuously, Lily would hold her breath in delight and her eyes would sparkle with pleasure. She was a born

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sailor. In the calm that succeeded, when the boys lay idly on their oars, and they had put into a little creek for lunch, she would sing to him, and he thought he had never heard a sweeter or a fresher voice.

One afternoon there happened an incident that never faded from Benson's memory. They had decided to take a trip into the Hartford River, and it was necessary to cross the bar. All the morning the rain had been falling fitfully, but the sun was fighting hard for the mastery, and about noon came out brightly and strong. The bar moaned like a thing in pain, and Mrs. Summerton earnestly advised them to postpone their holiday. But Lily laughed at her mother's fears, and they set out after a late breakfast.

They sped merrily down the harbour, and made for the bar. The wind was blowing in gusts, and the boat rocked as the sail broadened to the breeze. But the tide was rising, and as they neared the sandbanks the spar was broken and the sail flapped down helplessly against the mast. One of the boys—a kru native of about eighteen—made a futile tug at the ropes, and as the boat lurched into the swell he pitched overboard. Lily put the tiller hard-a-port, intending to reach the shore, and the boy swam by the side of the boat for a few minutes. He had gripped it with eager fingers, and his companions tried to assist him over the side. Then there was a sudden commotion on the surface of the water, and a widening crimson patch showed that a shark had taken off one of his legs. With admirable presence of mind Frank gripped the poor fellow under the armpits. As he lifted the native slowly

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upward he was pushed roughly aside by the other krumen. They were in a panic. "He no use without him leg," they cried gaspingly. Before either the man or the girl could interfere they had beaten at the trembling unfortunate with their oars. Although he clung obstinately to the boat, he was driven by sheer influence of blows into the surf. The blood-stained breakers closed over his head for ever.

Lily had sunk back exhausted in the stern, and as the boat reached the beach she fainted. Benson carried her gently into the house, and left her in the care of her mother. After that their excursions in the bay ceased. For two days he did not see the girl, and he returned to the farm work feeling that he alone was responsible for her distress. Presently she was to be seen at her usual household and garden avocations, and they again continued their intimacy. It was now Lily's turn to open her mind, and she spoke freely of her childhood, spent amid the wonders of the fields. Benson found her more charming every day, and yet his critical faculties could not admit her to be called beautiful. She had innumerable black admirers, but she treated all with the same degree of friendly politeness. She disdained, or pretended to disdain, the elemental passions, and had a keen contempt for mawkishness. Perhaps this air of cold superiority was at the root of her peculiar enchantment. She was a child in matters of the world, with all a child's innocence. Yet her conversation was singularly decided and well-informed. Thus, they were speaking one night of Clayton, of whose movements every Liberian was thoroughly cognisant, and Lily said emphatically—

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“The majority of young men are foolish, and too susceptible to natural desires. I haven’t met many yet whom I could properly respect. There are scores of things that a woman could do better than a man if she were permitted the chance.”

Then her eyes drooped, and Summerton laughed at her sagacity.

“You would always play first fiddle for one thing, perhaps?” he suggested.

Lily’s eyes met Frank’s in a gaze of raillery, and her mouth contracted in a smile. “We do that already, although the men don’t know it. Lady Hallé is a magnificent violin-player, I believe. But she will never learn how to play upon the second fiddle.”

“Who told you that, child?” cried Mrs. Summerton. “It is true. I remember when first Joe proposed. He gave me to understand that he must rule. But I had the selection of all the furniture, none the less. And he has not interfered with my plans once since then.”

Summerton looked quizzically at the young people, while his wife substantiated her contention by fragments of local history. Lily rose and ascended the stairs. Soon strains of music floated down to them. Frank excused himself and went to join her. Who would listen to Mrs. Summerton’s stories while that sweet voice continued to sing the ballads of England?

CHAPTER VIII

ONE POINT OF VIEW

“I affirm that tranquillity is nothing else than a good ordering of the mind.”

“IVY COTTAGE,

“BUCHANAN,

“January, 19—

“DEAR FATHER AND MOTHER,

“So at last you have remembered the existence of lonely me, living in the land of strange faces, other minds. How anxiously I have been waiting for a letter from England! It is over six months since I arrived here, and only one little epistle has reached me during that period. But I mustn't complain. I can see from the date of your present letter that you replied promptly enough to the one sent by me last September.

“Marvel not at the address of this. I am spending a few weeks with Mr. Summerton, a Liberian trader of great influence, and the change is most enjoyable. During five or six days of each week I am taking lessons in piassava-growing, and hope some day to pose as an authority upon matters Liberian.

“‘Am I not longing to return?’ Candidly I can answer ‘No.’ As I write now the moon is shining

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serenely over the bay, and I am looking out of my window with infinite content. After the turbulences and mind-agonies of the last few months spent in England—the restlessness and the heart-burning—it is just as though I had fallen into a sweet tranquil sleep after a spell of nightmare. I am glad to be here. So long as those whom I love are happy and write to me cheerfully, I will not return to England. But if I heard disquieting news from home I should feel the month's voyage between us to be almost interminable.

“Sometimes, indeed, when the long day's work is done, I have sat on the verandah at the Atlantic House, gazing seaward, and listening to the cries of the birds in the trees. Then, and only then, has England called me. The snow will be with you now. You will be surrounded with all the fresh stillnesses of winter. The air will be clear and crisp, you will be wrapped up and covered as a protection against the cold, and my little friends will be boisterously snowballing one another. Strange contradiction! Here, we attire ourselves in our flimsiest garments, and almost persuade ourselves about the hour of noon that the skin is quite superfluous.

“‘But what is Bassa like?’ I hear you exclaiming. Come, then, let me take you for a long walk, and you will know the place almost as well as myself. This cannot be asserting very much, as I do not tread to any great extent from the beaten track—as yet! I hope to improve my knowledge as time goes on. But, thanks to that faculty of attention which you, dear father, early implanted within me, I daresay I have learned infinitely more

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in the time spent here than certain others would have done : these blind folk going about with their eyes (metaphorically speaking) out on loan, and their ears temporarily asleep.

“Practically speaking, Grand Bassa is the most important place on the Liberian coast. The name has a native meaning which is rather obscure, but there can be no doubt that early in the sixteenth century it was known to the Spanish and Portuguese slave traders.

“The houses are for the most part built of timber and zinc, and are painted white. As they peep out from among the dark foliage of the trees they form a not unpicturesque scene. There are, of course, no paved roads, as this is not an affluent colony. The paths are of fine white sand, and looked at from the distance appear to wind like thin cords over the clear green of the grass and wayside herbs. At intervals a giant palm or cotton tree rises high into the sky, and on either hand grow pineapples and other wild fruits.

“Which last remark reminds me—as Mrs. Gamp would say—that the whole of Liberia is very fertile, and that vegetables abound.

“The view we enjoy from here is very beautiful. The sun sinks very rapidly below the horizon after seven o'clock, and in an incredibly short time the land is enveloped in darkness. But when the moon has fully risen one can almost see as well as in broad daylight. I have noticed at home in our large cities that the advance of night is attended by a great stillness. Here a thousand sleepers are awakened by the approach of darkness. Bats fly past your ears, huge moths and beetles whirr

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through the air, tree-frogs and crickets emit that strange weird sound which is so characteristic of night in the tropics, and the air sparkles brilliantly with the passage of fire-flies and their phosphorescent mates.

“The effect of the moon upon the sea is lovely in the extreme. Some of my poet friends would give half their songs for the inspiration to be derived from the scene. The moon appears almost twice the size to which we are accustomed in England, and the long line of the coast seems to palpitate with an almost unnatural light. The trees stand out clearly against the sky, and upon some of them the fruit is disclosed. To the left of the harbour is a long reef of black rocks, upon which the sea breaks in magnificent splashes of foam. Here the *Calabar*, one of Elder’s steamers, foundered some three years ago, and to-day her masts appear many feet above the waters as an ever-present testimony to the dangers of these shores.

“Am I boring you? The Liberians, like all emancipated negroes, are rather inflated, but they have many admirable traits in their characters. One of their affectations is peculiarly amusing. This is the love of high-sounding words and phrases. The following little story will illustrate my statement. Mr. Johnson, a renowned Liberian lawyer, is retained by the firm for advice. The statute of the Republic is intricate, and he is in constant demand. One day recently he had an appointment with Mr. Wrigley, and arrived rather late. After greeting us, this was his excuse: ‘Gentlemen, I am extremely sorry that I have been delayed, and must apologise most profusely for

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keeping you waiting. But the humidity of the atmosphere oppressed me in a degree, and this, combined with the tardiness of the boys engaged to convey me to my destination, rendered my itineration extremely difficult and, in fact, quite injucundant.'

"Our agent urged me to meet one of these gentlemen on his own ground. Such a warfare of words without meaning took place that the listeners—Wrigley, Clayton, and others—had to retire in dismay. Mr. Henry James would have been in the seventh heaven had he been present, I am sure!

"I can understand father's desire to have a brief outline of the business here. But I have endeavoured to taboo the subject, as I do not wish to render my letters over-dry. Very little direct selling occurs in Grand Bassa, the star of barter being in the ascendant. The native and Liberian traders require all manner of things—liquor, utensils, tobacco, and cotton goods. They dispose of their produce, which is principally palm oil, piassava, kernels, and coffee, for the goods required. No cash is exchanged, as a relative value is placed upon everything in dollars and cents—the currency of the Republic. The business is intricate in proportion with the various values placed upon the merchandise and produce. About a dozen boats, each carrying a crew of eight kruboyes—all the blacks are 'boys,' whether they be five or fifty—are engaged in carrying the produce from the rivers and coast towns, and a great number of Bassa and Vey natives are employed in the yard, bundling up the fibre and cooking the palm oil preparatory to shipment. We white people have no manual tasks, but

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the energy necessary to a proper management of the place is fatiguing in the extreme. The Liberian clerks in the store and warehouse are fairly well educated, and relieve us from a great deal of clerical work.

There is a big dance on in Krutown at present. They call it the Jengua, I believe, and the play is to last for nearly a fortnight. The other night, as I lay in my bed listening dreamily to the long swish of the waves on the beach, I heard the opening of the holiday. Every night since then I have been kept awake until the small hours of the morning listening to the scratching of the kitty-katty, the monotonous wail of the tom-tom, and the twanging of the harp. But these alone would be as silence compared to speech; for it is the unearthly screams, the piercing shrieks, and the emphatic *‘——,’ with the frantic chorus of ‘——,’ which renders the night so hideous.

“Just after dinner to-night, Tuesday, I went rather tentatively to the town. The natives all know me very well; but it was obvious that this occasion had nothing in common with the harmless little plays at which I had been wont to applaud. Without losing their air of deference and respect, they plainly indicated that my presence was not required, so I stayed only a few minutes. Many of the men and women were drunk, and my face burned as I saw my favourite houseboys among the seething mass of howling players. At the breast of several of the elder women, seated before

* We are unable to quote the native words, as they are of the immodest import general to these carnival chants of the uneducated negro.

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their hut doors, apparently watching the dance, were puking infants ; and I inwardly shuddered at the thought of the vile liquor being transmitted to the mouths of the little ones.

“The liquor traffic among the natives I believe to be a great evil. Unchecked by legislation, this traffic, whether in the hands of white merchants or Liberian traders in the interior of the county, assumes large proportions. To the credit of the British colonies be it said that there is maintained a strict prohibition on the sale of rum and gin, and that a careful supervision is kept over the quantity disposed of.

“Alcohol has been responsible for innumerable injuries to the physical welfare of nations, and the disappearance of aborigines before civilisation in other parts of the world is largely due to excessive drinking. It is a deplorable fact that the mortality among the native tribes of Liberia is very great, and that thirty-eight years is about the average age of a worker. Here, of course, there can be no fear of the native tribes vanishing, because of the strong minority of the landowners ; but the brain is animalised, pregnated with superstition, cramped and confined by excessive use of alcohol. What is the use, to a nation that yearns ardently for the recognition and approval of its fellows, of a race of physically well-developed men when they are kept in a state of serfdom, vice, and ignorance by the abuses of liquor? Liberia can never hope to produce noble intellects from her native tribes until some authoritative kind of superintendence is exercised over them in their homes. All her efforts after emancipation and education

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are sapped of their vitality by the bane of drunkenness.

“It must be remembered that liquor appeals irresistibly to the native mind, uncultured, undeveloped. It is a luxury which, when opportunity offers, it would be worse than folly to refuse. The native is not conscious of any moral obligations to society. Alcohol is meant to be drunk, and he drinks it with the same natural robustness of appetite as that with which he gorges himself on an excessive supply of rice. Moreover, it must not be forgotten that the half-drunken man or woman or child is a criminal. When sober the most uncultivated being is safe and sane; he is, without any strong incentive, law-abiding and peaceable. When drunk he is unsafe and insane, and without strong restraint is, moreover, the root of a thief and a murderer.

“We white people have burdened ourselves with a heavy curse. I am no ranting temperance advocate, but the system inaugurated by coast traders of permitting the natives to purchase gin and rum *ad libitum*, without any moral or social *governance of their conduct at home*, is a terrible responsibility. As an employee of an English firm, daily selling liquor in large quantities, this may appear illogical reasoning; but the traffic is not mine. I have the financial interests of my firm at heart I know; but wherefore, when the Liberian Senate increased the duty upon liquor to the extent of about 200 per cent. above the actual cost, and our agent denounced them as ‘impeders of trade and blind to the interests of their own Republic,’ could not my lips form an endorsement of his

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opinions? Perhaps there is light on the horizon of this long-standing corruption of the country's manhood at last. If the brutalising excesses of liquor can be prevented by this mode of procedure, one Englishman will be intensely pleased. I saw a horrible sight the week before I journeyed to Ivy Cottage, and my body quivered as though I were suffering the pain myself. The boys are, on the whole, honest; but here and there you will find a black sheep. One of the Veys had stolen a case of gin worth a couple of pounds sterling, and hidden it behind one of the outstanding buildings. Mr. Wrigley is judicious. He understands the native well, and has had long experience of Liberian administration. He asked that the culprit should allow twice the value of his theft to be deducted from his quarter's wages. The other natives refused, and sentenced their fellow to be whipped. Dendoo, the head man of the yard, executed the punishment, and when he had finished the poor fellow's back was covered with blood. He did not utter a sound of protest, but turned piteous eyes on mine. We were on the piazza reluctantly watching.

“It is only just that a thief should be punished, and I acknowledge the fairness of this code of ethics. But I fear that there are two sides to my little soul, and that the darker side sometimes o'ershadows the other. The good part pleads, but is equitable. The wicked part dare not, by reason of its own infirmities, condemn: and therefore cries aloud for a general pardon for evildoers. Picked members of a selected society, bred in the atmosphere of uprightness, fed with good sound

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moral law, and fully catechised from the cradle onward in the paths of virtue, have no right to judge hastily. Their very honesty vitiates the verdict. God who made the lamb made also the wolf, and the Divine Mind which conceived goodness had permitted sin and hate to flourish. May He make me always merciful, for He alone knows that I can never condemn.

“Mr. Summerton has a very pretty daughter—Lily. We are great friends, and I am enjoying my holiday immensely. . . .

“To those correspondents whom I appear to be neglecting please tender my apologies. Tell them it is no easy matter to write to a wide circle of acquaintances, when a month’s voyage divides Liberia from England. Assure them, however, that it is not lack of esteem that keeps me silent. Some day I shall feel unusually energetic, and will then write to them all ‘one time.’

“Meantime accept my tenderest thoughts, and believe me to be

“Yours always,

“FRANK.”

CHAPTER IX

AN INTERLOPER

“Who is he?”

BENSON had been at Buchanan, Ivy Cottage, for nearly two months; and during the whole of that time he had heard nothing definite from the factory regarding his return. Occasionally Mr. Wrigley wrote to him, expressing a few commonplaces. But beyond these sporadic notes there were no instructions. Frank was well content.

March was half over, and he was helping Lily with her flowers one morning. The captain from a passing steamer was ashore, and now he came down the road in the company of another man. They were passing the house, and Benson raised his head from the carnations which he was tending. The captain saluted him and smiled. But the passenger, a tall, stalwart fellow, with ruddy face and heavy moustache, paused. He came forward doubtfully.

“Frank Benson?” he said interrogatively. “Surely I am not mistaken.”

“The same, Mr. Pyne. How are you? I thought that you were down on the Congo accumulating copy for your new series in Appleby’s.”

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“And I never expected to meet you in Liberia. Everyone is asking at home what part of the coast has claimed you. I suppose you are up to the eyes in work? Are you studying native fetish? It is the last subject that I should have deemed of interest to you.”

Benson shook his hand. “I pray you do not tell any of the men at the clubs my address. With the exception of my work for the local press, and such desultory studies as may engage my leisure, I am free from literary calls. Do me this favour, Pyne. A busy man like you, with a pen remarkable for its facility, can hardly understand. But I want to enjoy my freedom a little longer.”

Pyne’s eyes smiled faintly, and he tugged at his moustache. He gave the required promise with an appearance of reluctance and passed on his way.

“Thank the powers,” exclaimed Frank, looking across at Lily, who had continued to prune her rose bushes.

“Who is he?” she asked eagerly, gazing after the sturdy figure.

“If you are a reader of Appleby’s—but I know you are—you must have seen his Colonel Kelly stories. He is E. A. Sutcliffe Pyne, the West African novelist.”

“Oh!” cried Lily, with quick animation. “I know his name well. Why didn’t you tell me before?”

“My dear child, how could I? You will probably see him half a dozen times during the present year. He always makes three or four trips when he is acquiring information. No

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doubt he is here now on account of the mining concession. He is ever keen upon stories of adventure."

"Is he quite within the ranks?"

She had picked up many of Benson's literary phrases, and asked her questions with a naive intimacy. This familiar tone she adopted only when speaking to those whom she intimately cared for. Frank felt flattered.

"He is very popular with the great magazine-reading public, and he wields a very facile pen."

"What powers of observation has he?"

"Great. For a writer is of no lasting good without this faculty. It alone is the spring of human activity, and from it arises our noblest literature. But I can hardly class Pyne among our best novelists. He is content with a popular success, and does not aim at perfection in style. None the less, he is a man who walks through life with every nerve on the alert, with eyes open to mark the characteristics of his fellows, and ears open to catch the throbbings of the great pulse of life."

Lily sighed. "Oh, Frank," she said, "when shall I see England?"

It was the first time that she had called him by his Christian name, and he turned from the gate over which he had been leaning with a little laugh. "I am well contented with Liberia myself, Lily. Here life is all leisurely work, and one does not feel inclined to return to brain-fagging labour when actual rest is at hand."

From that time onward Lily talked more openly of books and bookmen. She revealed herself as

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an omnivorous reader, and spoke freely of modern fiction. Benson listened in amaze while she discussed Stevenson and Hardy, Meredith and Henry James. He began to understand by degrees that the blood of her white ancestors was stirring in her veins.

Mrs. Summerton returned from the town that night in a hammock. She had been making her usual purchases at the stores, and as she came up the steps of the piazza her face looked wan and drawn. As soon as dinner had been disposed of she went to bed. "I am tired," she said. Summerton took up a cigar and followed her in some perturbation. He evidently intended to have a talk with her before she slept. Mrs. Summerton generally enjoyed the best of apparent health.

Frank and Lily were left alone. She played with the leaves of a book.

"Aren't you longing to return to England?" she said after a long silence. "I am sure you must be tired of this sleepy place. You do at least get noise over there."

"Tired!" exclaimed Frank. "Why, I am far better placed here than I could possibly be in Manchester or London. There I am tied to a sordid round of duties all the week. I can never really call a moment my own. Here I am free. In Liberia I live; in England I simply have an existence."

"But you have said that work is the only thing worth living for."

"True. I have never yet known a man die of overwork. When this is ascribed as the cause of decease you may rest assured that the real

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motive was lack of appreciation. Now, in England my employment had deteriorated into mere labour. I wrote and wrote, not because I loved to hold my pen—and this should be the only motive for writing—but because a certain editor or a certain publisher had asked for a particular contribution.”

“Yet you are a writer for art’s sake,” said Lily convincingly.

“How do you know that? For this very reason, Lily, I hated my work. A heap of books, that my sense of balance would not permit me to read, was sent to me for review at periodic intervals—as regularly as my cheques. An existence upon the productions of mediocre authors was intolerable. No. Now I am living honourably; honestly living. I have leisure enough to make my articles for the *Monrovia* magazines gratifying to my critical talents, and I am learning something new about the earth upon which God has placed me to live my two score or three score and ten of years.”

Two days later Benson received a letter from his agent. It ran—

“MY DEAR BENSON,

“I am afraid that I must recall you to the Atlantic House instantly. The *Nyana* leaves to-day homeward-bound, and Clayton is to travel by her. After some consideration of his case, I have decided to send him to England. Of course, I will not profess to say that I have known nothing of his intrigues with native girls during the eight months that he has been in Grand Bassa. But

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I was content to wink at them so long as they did not interfere with business. A new development, anent the Vey girl named Samie, has come to my ears, and I fear a scandal if he remains here any longer. Further than this, I acted upon your suggestion regarding the presence of Mrs. Wrigley, and my wife and daughter are due to arrive at this place six weeks from now. We must preserve the prestige of the firm, and it would be supremely embarrassing for Clayton to be still on the spot when the ladies arrive.

“Mrs. Wrigley visited me for three months of last year, and has spent many years of her life on the coast. This climate seems to be agreeable to her in a high degree. It has only been the care of Maggie that has kept her away from me so long. My daughter’s education is now completed, and she seems eager to make her home with her mother and myself in Grand Bassa. She is seventeen years of age, and I am sure that I can rely upon your conduct while you are here with us. I speak openly; but the morals of the coast in their excessive looseness render such freedom imperative. I know that I am justified in my confidence, as your careful attention to your duties amply evidences the fact.

“Reverting again to Clayton. I am not wishful to injure his future, so have spoken only very tentatively to the firm regarding his indiscretions. It is probable that they will send him to Sinoe, and in this event I shall privately instruct Bell, the agent there, to give him special attention.

“Will you send down your boxes to-day? I hardly know whether you care to say ‘good-bye’

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to your late fellow-traveller. Probably not. I presume that an interview with him would only disconcert you. I leave the matter in your own hands. But I look for your return either to-day or to-morrow.

“Convey my regards to Mr. and Mrs. Summer-ton and their daughter. With sincere wishes for your own welfare, believe me to be,

“Yours, etc.,

“RALPH WRIGLEY.”

Frank smiled rather cynically as he refolded the large business sheet.

“I am recalled to the factory,” he said to the family over dinner. “Clayton is leaving by this steamer, and Mr. Wrigley requires my assistance at once.”

Lily looked at him blankly. Perhaps, thought Benson, she had grown so accustomed to his presence that she had deemed the date of his return too ambiguous for serious consideration. Mr. and Mrs. Summerton received the news more prosaically, and urged him cordially to give them the pleasure of his company over the week-ends.

“Let us have our last night together on the water,” said Lily. They joined a little party of Accra fishers, and despite their amaze at the boldness of the freak, seized upon a little dug-out canoe. The moon was at the full and the pale stars twinkled in the deep vault of the sky. Frank found a boundless delight in the placid beauty of the dark sea, and Lily used her charm so effectively that the surly Accra-men welcomed

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them among their own boats as they left the beach. A river of flashing white broke the surrounding blueness of the bay, where the moon threw down her beams. The splendid shimmer of the fish as they were drawn from the water and lay at the bottom of the canoes fascinated the young people. They held each other's hands, and the spirit of the night bound them in a great silence.

Early the next morning he was standing in the hall. His boxes he had despatched on the previous afternoon. Summerton joined him at the door.

"I am sorry that you are leaving us at present, Frank." There was a genuine ring of regret in his voice. "The state of Mrs. Summerton's health alarms me, and I could have wished that you were still a member of the household. She seems to have become unaccountably weak and short of breath since Christmas."

"No doubt your wife has been working too hard," said Benson, though he knew that Mrs. Summerton's paleness and weariness came from another source.

"She was never tired in the old days, and I am afraid she may have the malady from which her father died. He was only thirty-five, and he went off quite suddenly with heart disease."

"I will come down and see you often. Meantime, don't worry yourself needlessly. Let Mrs. Summerton rest for a few days, and she will soon be hearty and well again."

The old negro had grown into the habit of bowing to the Englishman's judgment. He always consulted him upon points of more than ordinary intricacy. Like many another fine Liberian, with

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a fluent tongue and a broad outlook upon life, he could neither read nor write. His reverence for Benson, whose local articles Lily read to him in secret, was therefore great in direct proportion to his own ignorance of the art of letters. He followed Frank down the path with a more satisfied air.

"One other matter unsettles me, Benson, my boy. If my wife died I should feel the responsibility of Lily's future very heavily. The girl ought certainly to settle down to matrimony. There are many bright young fellows she might have, and I have imagined lately that she is attached to her cousin Jack. Do you know him? A smart youth, my brother John's son at Hartford. But you can never tell with Lily. She is so irresolute and impetuous."

Frank smiled at the contradiction of terms that yet so aptly described Lily's happy caprices, and said with interest, "Go on, please."

"She will marry Jack, I have no doubt. He is doing very well in his father's business, and will some day be a substantial landowner."

"At least he has your approval," said Benson, with a slight display of bitterness.

"He has indeed! I want to see Lily married to a man whom I can trust."

Frank felt unmistakably hostile towards this unknown cousin Jack. When Lily appeared from the upper rooms, and commenced her operations on the plants, he watched her for a few minutes in silence. Then he said ardently, "Lily, I am going. Won't you say 'good-bye' to me?"

"Oh, good morning, Mr. Benson. You aren't

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going to England, are you?" She showed him her white teeth framed in their scarlet lips. "You will come and see us again soon."

A lark had just commenced its throbbing song of adoration in the exquisite morning air as he turned his face towards the fields.

CHAPTER X

SAMIE

“Before you give way to anger, try to find a reason for not being angry”

FRANK was a little diverted during the next few days to find that he entertained a decided emotion of enmity towards his unknown rival. He made inquiries of Mr. Wrigley about the young man's position, and learned that he had been educated in Sierra Leone, and was thoroughly Anglicised in speech and manners. His skin, however, distinctly showed his negro blood. The agent spoke warmly of his genial manner and open-handed liberality. Benson's heart felt a sudden pang. He resented the cordial tone, and for some days preserved a gloomy silence. To the man placed in authority above him he could not give the degree of friendly respect with which he had been wont to serve him. ...

A month after his return to his ordinary duties as correspondent at the Atlantic House he learned from one of the house-boys that Samie of Veytown, Clayton's purchased wife, had given birth to a son. He received the intelligence with some surprise and afterwards a feeling of repulsion. In that Clayton had eluded the situation by his departure he felt vaguely relieved. But he condemned his conduct none the less heartily when he communed

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with himself. Later he learned that the native girl had named the child after her white lover. Every baby on the coast begins its life with a temporary name, and makes its own selection when it has arrived at the years of discretion. Samie had called her boy Artie, this having been the affectionate mode of address permitted by her lover. To Samie Clayton had said that he would return quickly, and the girl implicitly believed him.

It was the first week in April, and the English spring would be making its presence felt in the dear islands so far away. Frank was swinging in his hammock, reading one of the new books just received from home. It was evening, and the yard-boys were noisily dispersing to their native towns. Soon the volume slipped from his fingers, and he fell into a doze. He was aroused by a touch on the hand. Samie stood before him, her fair-skinned baby strapped across her back.

"Ee benoo," she said, smiling with a flash of teeth remarkable for their whiteness and regularity.

"Good evening," he replied wonderingly.

Then there was silence. The girl was evidently waiting for something further from him. At last she said hesitatingly, "You no savee who I be?"

"I know who you are," he replied. The question strangely angered him. Did not everyone in Grand Bassa know her; and had not every tattler made Clayton's love affairs her own special business?

"You are Samie, the Vey girl, aren't you?" he asked.

Her head went up haughtily. "No," she said; "I am de wife of Mister Arthur Clayton."

Benson could not resist the impulse to laugh.

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But his mirth was quickly arrested by a glance at the baby. Surely in the sight of God *that* constituted marriage? For what more lasting bond could there be than a child? He was intensely fond of children. The little one looked up at him unmeaningly as he took it in his arms. He examined its features closely. There could be no mistaking the little eyes and chin, flexible and unformed. They belonged unmistakably to Clayton.

"You think so that he be like them other Bassa baby? Ah no! He is a diamond. Look at him eyes. Did you ever see a black baby with blue eyes before?"

She took the child from him, and dangled it over the piazza. A brightness shone in her eyes, and she was laughing with the happy abandon of motherhood. Suddenly she sobered, and turned to him imperiously.

"Do you savee them spring for England side?"

"Yes. I am a great lover of nature."

"Ah, you be wise man for true. Tha's why you come for this black-man country."

"You do me honour," said Frank gravely.

"Then tell me when the spring-time come again. Can it come just now—right now?"

"Spring is in England now," he answered. It was not difficult to guess the trend of these questions. Clayton had promised an early return ere the spring had passed. For a few minutes she was silent with a light in her eyes like that of a musing goddess. Her chiefest beauty lay there. They were large, black, sparkling. And her body had all the grace of budding sufficiency.

"Massa Benson, tell me true. Suppose some

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man get married for your country, do he stay married all time? He no fit get undone?"

"No," replied Frank, with some hesitancy. "That is to say, he cannot cancel a marriage without a great deal of trouble."

"And it is no matter where them mammie live?"

Benson was becoming alarmed; but he answered truthfully, "No."

A happy sigh came from between the girl's parted lips. "That is too beau'ful altogether. Man no fit undo them marriage 'cept it be in big house, all same Buchanan, before plenty men?"

"That is true—in England."

"Suppose a baby come. That be fine? Them white man he like to have baby?"

Frank did not answer immediately. He thought of Lily Summerton, and pictured himself as her husband. His lip was twitching as he answered—

"Yes. Every man is proud of his children, I should think."

"And them baby—he look like him daddy all time?"

This futile catechism was becoming strained. Frank spoke almost irritably.

"Generally the child possesses some characteristics of its father. That is to say, of course, when it is not too strikingly like the mother."

Samie's face glowed rapturously. Again she handed him the child, and stood proudly by while he made play with it, and pronounced him to be a fine little fellow.

If passion is to be enthroned where the Eternal has ruled that love, as sanctified by marriage, should be supreme, then misery with all its attendant

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remorses must desolate the heart and mind of the seducer. Lust can only steal the pleasures which are reserved for the pure. Surely, to comprehend love in the relation intended by the sexual impulses of attraction and repulsion, to know passion in its beauty, its completeness and its power, to free it from grossness and evil, marriage is essential? God has assigned to physical attraction so prominent and important a place in man's life that passion should not be lightly purchased or indulged. Man-made morals are lax. True, the civil law always arraigns the man as the criminal in all actions of seduction. But while the law is supposed to punish the man, public sentiment ostracises the woman. Samie's degradation would be hard to bear. Frank sighed.

But suddenly the native girl remembered that in her anxiety to satisfy her doubts and fears, she had overlooked all those social courtesies taught by her people. The West Coast negro is very polite.

"Tell me how you be? How is them health, and be it long time since las' you sick? I sorry too much that I wake you when I come."

He answered humorously that he felt quite well. Witnessing these little revelations of character, he felt ashamed of his recent vexation; and only pity for the girl moved him as he assured her that he could well spare the time spent in her company.

"T'ank you. That be fine for true."

She held out her little hand, and turned to go. At the door of the dining-room she looked round and came back.

"I want to come see you for long, long time. But I fear them old white man; what you call him?"

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—them Ligley. I see him go past we town, and then I come.”

Mr. Wrigley had been asked to dine at the house of the local superintendent. Frank marvelled at the intimacy displayed. Was it possible that the actions of the white people were closely examined and criticised? He looked at the girl with increased admiration. Her consideration for his judgment was at least complimentary.

“Mister Clayton—he be fine man.”

He replied warmly. With all his faults Clayton had been a good companion, and in the days before he had known the Summertons Frank had often realised the value of his conversation.

“Yes,” she said musingly. “Them first time I see him I just come from the gri-gri bush and I fear him plenty. But he get such nice hair, not long all same you, but fine and soft; and he sit by my side and hold my hand. He be so funny at first. He just look, look, look.”

She laughed happily.

“Until I see him I no seem to live. He make me happy, happy, happy.”

This reiteration—a quality peculiar to the natives—came with delightful verve from her lips.

“Yes, I fear him them first time I look him; but soon——”

A lump was rising in Benson’s throat. He felt that he must do something for the girl. In what way could he possibly prepare her for the inevitable result of Clayton’s perfidy? There was every probability that he would not return to Bassa, and if he did Frank strongly doubted whether the girl would hold any attraction for him at a future date.

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The matter was both a difficult and a delicate one to handle. But he advised her gently to return to her people in Capemount, and to think no more of white men. With every word he knew that he was strangling her dreams of future happiness. Clayton had taught her English, had shown her the joy of her womanhood, was the father of her child. In the eyes of this girl he would be a god, a king. But Benson's rage was not against the native girl so much as against the social custom that permitted her to be degraded and rendered miserable at the whim of a white man who had paid for the possession of her body.

At first she looked at him reproachfully. This quickly gave place to indignation. She clutched the baby to her breast, and turned away.

"Goo'-bye," she said coldly.

Frank dined alone, and was very miserable for the whole of the evening. The agent came in flushed with his walk through the night. It was about nine o'clock.

"Mrs. Wrigley and Maggie are on the next steamer, I hear," he said. "I have just secured a letter from the post office that has been lying about since last week."

Benson expressed his pleasure at the news, and they lapsed into animated conversation upon things Mancunian.

It was on the following morning that he met Jack Summerton for the first time. The young negro had come down to the factory on behalf of his uncle. Frank shrewdly suspected that the old trader had brought about the meeting with the intention of satisfying him as to his soundness of

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judgment in selecting Jack Summerton as Lily's prospective husband. Frank came up from the store in answer to the call of his agent.

"Hullo, Mr. Benson," young Summerton said freely. "How do you do? Uncle says we are to be friends."

"I am glad to meet you," said Benson shortly. Then "How is Miss Summerton?" he asked.

"Oh, she's well." Jack glanced inquiringly at the Englishman. Somehow it was not difficult to discern the change of voice.

"She talks literature with you, doesn't she? Too bad, for a journalist on a holiday. Lily plays so slow sometimes—enough to give one the hump. When she starts on the book question I always clear out. But she rarely does that with me."

"Very probable," replied Frank drily. His spirits had greatly improved. "In your case she would not feel the same necessity for effort. You would have greater facilities for conversation, I'll be bound, if the book question were to be left out altogether. Won't you have a cigarette?"

Jack accepted willingly. He had a bright face and well-curled hair; but he dressed rather too loudly for taste, and he carried an air of affectation. They puffed away in silence for a time.

"It is some months since you were here before, I believe," observed Frank presently. "You have not visited the factory since I came to Liberia."

"No. You see, there is plenty to do at dad's end of the town, and I spend all my spare time at Ivy Cottage. But Lily is always out, or upstairs, when I call."

He was disarmed by Benson's tone of growing

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friendliness, and leaned back in his chair comfortably.

"That is rather unfortunate," said Frank conventionally. He smiled nevertheless.

"It is a nuisance, I can tell you, after a fellow has walked two miles to see her. The fact is——" He paused and looked closely at his companion. "Well, there's a little matter that I have wanted to mention to Lily now for some time, but for the life of me I can't. Every time I see her I feel that I simply daren't."

Frank only opened his eyes more widely.

"Lily seems to have changed since—since you came to Grand Bassa. She is more serious, more booky, than ever. I remember the time when we used to go bird-nesting together. And it isn't so very long ago either."

Benson nodded.

"All day long now she pores over her magazines and novels. It's the poorest thing I ever heard of. I used to be the same once; a long time ago. Since dad has taken me into his business I seem to care less for the eternal course of reading. And Lily doesn't know that I am changed. That's the devil of it. I want to show her that she is only wasting time, and that we could be quite happy together in Grand Bassa or Monrovia. But she is eternally harping upon the string of England, and that makes me feel mad."

"I am sorry," said Frank gravely.

"She got the craze first through her father's enthusiasm for white culture," Jack went on in an aggrieved voice. "Of course, you are an Englishman, and I cannot expect you to understand the

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negro's standpoint. As a nation you are so beastly proud. But we have a blood and a pedigree as well as you. This Anglicising of Liberia is ruining the country. The mingling of white blood with ours is removing our own racial power. Besides, we have no real claim to a place in the European nations as yet, and such aspirations are sure to result in disaster."

"I am very sorry," repeated Frank. He began to feel more friendly towards the negro who sat opposite him, turning the rings round on his fingers and looking moodily out at the sea.

"She thinks that the views of the two races can be reconciled, and the chiefest reason why she cares for you is that you are always striking that note in your articles. I shouldn't have been born."

"My dear fellow, don't talk so hopelessly. Our fates are in our own hands," said Frank, merely for the sake of saying something.

"I know that I am unworthy of her. She is far above me in every way. But when a chap has been educated at the best school accessible, and is in a prosperous position, he doesn't expect that the only barrier between himself and the girl he loves shall be that she is possessed of a whiter skin than he can display. If my father had kept me at home and sent me to the local school, I might have been happier. There are so few really instructed girls to be found here. In the old days I didn't feel the difference so much; but now I couldn't marry a native. And Lily seems to have grown over my head since last year. What is a fellow to do?"

Benson made a sudden resolve. He would not propose to Lily yet. If she seemed to favour the

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suit of her cousin, he would withdraw, and further the cause of the young negro all he knew how. He was amused at the youthful pessimism of Jack's remarks, and felt anxious that his career should not be spoiled by a disappointment. His own interest in the case of Lily's decision seemed for the moment to diminish. There was something novel in the position that appealed to his sense of grim-mest humour. He leaned forward and tapped his companion on the arm.

"A counsellor is never thanked," he said. "But I am determined to advise you. Promise me that you won't be too resentful."

Jack looked more dejected than ever, but said, "Go on."

"I like you for your frankness, and I think I know why you have spoken so openly to me on the first occasion of our meeting." He spoke with that elaborate distinctness which he always spent upon subjects that interested him. "I am only a few years older than you—perhaps three—but I have seen many nice fellows ruined through mistakes in matrimony. The question hinges upon the suitability of your disposition to that of Miss Summerton; how do you know that you can make her happy?"

Jack shrank. "What do you mean?" he asked. "We are both of the one blood, members of the one community, and we have known each other from childhood." His lower lip was twitching, and his eyes looked troubled.

"This is what I mean. Your cousin is an emotional girl, sensitive, cultured, educated. She has probably met only one or two men in the

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whole of her rustic life, and you, an impetuous, hearty boy, were her companion as a child. You loved this playmate. But since you have entered into the business of your father's estate, she has grown both mentally and spiritually. She is not now the same Lily Summerton you knew a few years ago. You are loving an illusionary creature."

He paused for a moment to finger the roses just placed on the table by the boys.

"My advice to you is this. Seriously cultivate for a few weeks the camaraderie that may exist between yourself and Miss Summerton. If your love grows, and you are satisfied that your views are permanent ones, proffer your cousin marriage. You may find—I doubt not that you will—that you have been worshipping an image. Then you will withdraw happier and wiser, leaving the field to other men."

Jack's eyes remained fixed on the glimmering expanse of ocean. Benson rose to his feet. "You will be down at the Atlantic House to thank me in a few weeks," he said. "Meantime I promise to remain here, and hold no communication whatever with Ivy Cottage except upon matters of business."

Jack too rose, and turned towards the door. "I cannot thank you now," he said rather hotly. "You are inclined to pedantry. I told Lily so last week. But you may be right, and I promise to play the game square."

He walked away from the house with the air of a man upon whose next action depends the fate of nations. Frank stood on the piazza watching his swiftly retreating figure with a strange smile of exultation.

CHAPTER XI

LOVE I' THE HEART

“’Tis a brief, brief madness”

JACK SUMMERTON went straight to Buchanan, and to the house of his uncle. He had not been to Ivy Cottage for nearly a month, and now he carried his head in the air. His mind was filled with high-souled resolves.

Lily came to him from the kitchen, her hands covered with flour. She was mixing cakes for the afternoon tea.

“Cousin Jack,” she exclaimed delightedly. She was genuinely pleased to see him, and laughed because she could not offer him her hand. But she put up her lips daintily, and Jack bent down to kiss them.

“How is uncle?” she asked. And they talked unconnectedly for a period of people in the neighbourhood. He had joined her at the little table, covered with cakes, and now watched her nimble manipulation of the paste with admiration.

“I say, Lil, let’s go for a walk when you’ve finished,” he said suddenly.

“Mother’s asleep. Let me take her a cup of tea and a cake, and then I’ll talk to you, sir.”

She took the hot pieces of pastry from the oven,

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spread a clean damask cloth on a tray, and then tripped upstairs to her mother's room. "Mother has been far from well for some time," she said upon her return. "She cannot come down to see you, but she sends her love. Now, let us have tea ourselves."

Jack was in paradise—or thought he was. After tea had been cleared away by the woolly-headed natives, Lily took up her hat. They walked leisurely down the road. The sun was not too hot, and they were soon outside the town and in the open country.

They came over the brow of the hill that looms behind Buchanan, and scaled the wooden fence of an outlying farm. Then they turned into the bush, and walked laughingly behind each other on the narrow path, arriving at last upon a grassy expanse of open land. It was a beautiful afternoon, and Lily's face glowed with the strength of the fresh air. Huge elms and palms dappled the ground with light and shadow, and the girl looked happy and bright. Jack gazed at her with quick and tender looks. He felt furtively ashamed.

"I really believe you would make the world go faster, Lil, if you could," he said, as she sped along beside him.

"Well, it doesn't move very fast at present, does it? At any rate, we don't need to hold on because of the rush in Grand Bassa."

As they swung on side by side they talked of the days when they had trod the same fields in search of flowers and butterflies. Jack paused several times beneath a favourite tree and recalled the wonder of the eggs found on yonder branch

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or the brilliant beetle caught in that deep hole. Often they had to leap over small pools of water, and then they laughed as the mud splashed on the further side. But they grew quieter as they rounded the path that would bring them to the beach again, and Jack became gloomy when Lily spoke of Benson and of the books he had sent her from time to time for perusal.

They had to pass an old dismantled house, and observing his reserve, Lily paused before it. The quaint old timbers and ruined steps possessed a certain charm. Jack proposed that they should rest for a time. They entered, and were soon delightedly examining the interior with its faint reminiscences of dead and gone occupants. The place was dark and cool, in direct contrast with the sunshine without. Their voices rang strangely colourable in the empty rooms. On the balcony were several old forms, and they seated themselves to continue their playful banter. After awhile they began to sing. Young Summerton's voice was a good baritone, and accorded well with Lily's sweet soprano. They sang several of the negro melodies—"The Old Kentucky Home," "We long for Carolina"—taught them by their parents. Then they drifted into old English ballads. Their voices went out into the stillness of the summer afternoon and echoed over the fields, returning with a purl like that of another pair of voices.

Jack ascended the stairs. The birds were chattering gaily in the gables. Lily laughed up at him with her subtle glance as his face appeared at the upper window. She commenced to hum gently, and his voice rang out with a jubilant thrill—

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*"I listen to the south winds gently sighing:
They speak of you."*

Suddenly the song was taken up from beyond the clearing in a clear tenor voice—

*" My Lily Lu,
To read the loving message I've been trying,
And it tells me that my love is true."*

Jack hesitated for a moment in amaze. Then he continued somewhat falteringly—

*"The shadows of the night are softly falling,
My Lily Lu, so fond and true ;
The mocking birds and whippoorwills are calling
To their mates as I call you."*

Lily drew back into the house with a smile, and sang the refrain. Benson was taking an evening stroll. He raised his hat with profound respect as he passed, but his face was eager. Lily began to sing again as if in challenge—

"Come to me, my Lady Lu—"

She broke off with a laugh, and her eyes gleamed with merriment. Jack had descended. Their song was hushed for a space. Lily sat with an absent look in her eyes. Her mind was in England, with the crowds and the noise and the multitudinous murmur of life. Jack knew nothing of her thoughts. He only saw before him the woman he loved, pensive, laughing, changeful. He took her hand almost reverently in his, and sat quietly by her side.

"Lily," he said at last, "I want to tell you something."

The girl glanced at his face and looked away

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again. Her mind was still bemused. She had only seen him in a momentary flash of consciousness.

"I want you to promise me that you'll be my wife some day," he said deliberately.

Lily turned round with suddenness. "Oh, Jack!" she cried painfully. She was greatly distressed, but he mistook the emotion written large on her face for pleasurable surprise.

"I know that you didn't expect it yet," he said quietly; "but you are the only girl I'd care to marry in the whole of Grand Bassa."

"Poor Jack!" said Lily tonelessly. "You are wrong altogether in proposing to me. I can never be your wife."

"You are going to marry that white chap," he cried bitterly. "That——" He stopped abruptly, for she was looking at him with great piteousness. His sense of injury and jealousy faded into nothingness. "Oh, Lily, don't cry! I am awfully sorry I worried you."

She rose suddenly, and said with forced brightness, "Let us go, Jack, you don't understand."

But young Summerton would not be satisfied with any ambiguity. His companion and playmate appeared to him in a specially lovable light as she stood before him, her eyes glistening with tears. She had placed one hand on the worm-eaten rail of the steps and looked back at him with trembling lips. "Come," she said.

He was in love with her. Until recently she had cared more for him than for any other man in Bassa. They had enjoyed themselves enormously on this summer afternoon. The compatibility

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of their temperaments was a proven fact. He flung his arms around her and drew her head down on to his breast. Lily was too numbed to resist. Then he poured into her ears a strange miscellany of broken sentences.

“I know that you must love me, Lil. Haven't we been children together and grown up hand in hand? I would have waited for you a long time in silence if that English fellow had not come to Liberia.”

Lily was laughing with restrained hysteria.

“Dear little Lil! I was half afraid at first you were going to say you liked him. Wasn't I a fool? I might have known that you would never think of violating our social customs so far. We are both of one blood, Lil, and I know I can make you happy. Look up and kiss me, dear. Why, what a lucky fellow I am—the most happy man in Grand Bassa!”

Lily disengaged herself from his grasp. She was crying behind her hands. His kisses had brought the shamed colour into her cheeks, and when she looked up the sunlight seemed to add an insult to her misery.

“Stop, Jack, stop! I don't know what you mean. You must not talk of these things to me. I can never be your wife. And you must not kiss me again like that. I am your cousin, nothing more.”

She gave a despairing little gesture.

“Oh, what has come over the world? Look how dull and grey the fields are! Let us go! let us go! If you don't leave me soon I shall choke.”

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She spoke passionately, tonelessly, aridly, and started away with a bound. Jack stood still for a few seconds after she had sped down the steps. His brow was painfully contracted, and his lips were trembling. He watched her stumble blindly along the path and then disappear between the trees. Her handkerchief had fallen across the rail. He picked it up mechanically, and then hurried after her. "I should never have been born," he whispered. "What a world of pain it is!"

He reached her side, and supported her over the fence. They were both silent and constrained.

"I was wrong, Lily," he said at last. "You are different. The Englishman was right. It is no use my thinking that you can remain in Liberia all your life. And a fellow like me has nothing to do with foreign countries."

For nearly ten minutes she was quiet, evidently thinking of his words. Then she looked at him in some surprise.

"Have you met Mr. Benson?"

"Yes, this morning, and he's a conceited bounder," he said savagely. Her reserve irritated him. All the buoyant hopes of the early morning had fallen to ashes.

"He is not a bounder," cried Lily indignantly. "How dare you speak so of him? And he is not conceited. He has been very kind to me, and he is the cleverest man I ever met."

"You haven't seen many," said Jack, still aggressively.

"No, I have not. But I know a gentleman when I meet one, and you have no right to abuse a man

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whom you have had no opportunities of understanding."

They walked the rest of the way in complete silence. There was a crimson shimmer from the setting sun upon the sea as they entered Buchanan, and the night birds were awakening. The trees seemed to hang over the path like the outstretched wings of an angel; but far away could be heard the cough of a leopard.

Lily halted at the gate, and Jack turned his face away. "Good-bye, Lil," he said. "I am the first to congratulate you. Benson will make you happy maybe."

The words came reluctantly from his lips. The final hopelessness of his position had been apparent to him since Benson's name was mentioned, and his fame defended, by Lily. She did not ask him the meaning of his words, but touched him beseechingly on his arm.

"You will come and see us sometimes?" she murmured.

"Yes; I suppose so."

"Then good night, Jack. Poor boy!" She laughed a little at the look of unwonted seriousness on his face, and ran into the garden. He had hardly crossed the road before she had caught up with him again, breathless, penitent, apologetic.

"Really, Jack, I am so sorry. Daddy had set his mind upon it, I know. But it would only make you unhappy, believe me. I love you just the same as ever, dear old playmate."

She flung her arms around him in her impulsive way. But Jack shook her hands off surlily, and continued his way homeward.

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“What is the matter, Jack?” the girl asked, walking beside him in great perplexity. “I didn't think you would mind so very much.”

“Oh, it's all right, Lil. Don't mind me. I'm a nasty-tempered nigger. Go home, and forget all about it. I'll come and see you sometimes.”

She turned away, only half satisfied. “Good night, then.” When she entered the parlour her eyes were filled with tears.

Her father had just returned from the farm, and Mrs. Summerton had managed to come downstairs for dinner. The great topic of conversation was the latest development in the case of Clayton. The piassava-grower spoke feelingly of the betrayed Vey girl, and condemned the laxity of morals which permitted such a denouement.

“Oh, daddy, I do wish you would leave the affairs of the white people alone,” she said. “We seem to have gone mad upon matters English. I am tired of hearing of the Atlantic House and its occupants.”

And perhaps, viewed in the light of the events of the last few hours, her sudden revulsion of feeling was a natural one.

CHAPTER XII

HIGH HOPES

“Bear in mind—we are *all* descended from a certain disreputable old gardener, who was turned out of his master’s garden for stealing his apples”

IT has frequently been asserted, and with reason, that every country is responsible for the emotional attributes of its inhabitants. Not the mere visitor, who views the landscape with the prejudiced vision of an alien, but the child bred upon the soil, can recognise its potential influences. The mood of the casual observer gives unto the neighbourhood an invariable issue. Temperament is the only natural exponent of local features, and to the native each tree, each blade of grass, possesses its own peculiar significance.

Could we all think alike, and receive impressions of the one uniform colour and tone, the traveller would be an unnecessary and neglected member of the community. For there would then be an end to all survey, and simply to portray a landscape would be an ample description of any verdant scene synonymous with that which it was originally intended to denote.

That we have not yet arrived at so successful a departure from the rules of the verbal delineator

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is perhaps to be regretted. There is always the sorcery of reminiscence. The stern individuality of blood is undeniable, and the ordinary negro-child born amid such an environment as Grand Bassa is so far susceptible to its surroundings as to disregard the maker of maps. There is no important development of talent to be remembered, no irrevocable history of unimpeachable progenitors to be borne, no stringent moral code to be followed, no tyrannical standard of *noblesse oblige* to be maintained. With an almost cynical indifference the Liberian Negro evades the feverish impulse of progress felt among his American and West Indian brothers, and retains the character usual to the accident of having been born outside the pale. The houses are epidermic, and labour is utilitarian only.

Because Lily Summerton was so different from the usual run of people in Grand Bassa, Frank Benson felt strangely attracted to her. Summerton tried more than once to find out Lily's intentions. He spoke to her jokingly, and yet with a certain degree of anxiety, of her cousin Jack, and strove to discover her real feelings towards him. He was desirous of seeing his daughter settled down in life, and although she replied frankly enough to his questions, she always spoke of herself as a visionary person. He was left quite in the dark regarding her private opinions. Once as they were speaking of England, apropos of a new parcel of novels from Mudie's, she said—

“When I go to England——”

“You are going to England, then?” her father asked in some astonishment, and with no little amusement at her decided tone.

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“Certainly, when I am married.”

“When will that be, Lily?” asked her mother.

The girl laughed with the old sparkle of eyes and twinkling of teeth. “Oh, one is sure to marry sooner or later. But I really intend to spend my honeymoon in London.”

It had been one of Summerton’s pet theories for many years that an admixture of negro and Caucasian blood justified a man in giving his children a thoroughly European education. For this reason he had not hesitated to instil into Lily’s mind a fervour for things English. Now he hesitated. He wanted Lily to marry her cousin, whom he knew to be agricultural in his tendencies. Jack would live and die in Liberia, and Europe possessed few charms for him. It was hard indeed to abuse his beliefs, and he realised that such treachery to his lifelong English patriotism would be almost blasphemous. But he said decisively—

“There may be many disadvantages in town of which you know nothing, Lily. Remember, there are miles and miles of monotonous streets and dreary alleys in all English towns. They would be unendurable to one who has been brought up in the open air. Unless you have plenty of money, existence in London, or Liverpool, or Manchester would be a terrible experience.”

He gave his imagination full rein, and conjured up a most deplorable picture of the lives of people who live in a town on limited incomes. He spoke of the dull grind of labour from early on Monday morning until noon on Saturday; of the unattainable delights of privacy; the invariable worry over pounds, shillings, and pence. Then he tried to

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prove that only few pleasures are to be found in the common paths of life. For the most, he talked pretty much at random, drawing upon his memory of the American cities of a decade ago. And he spoke unconvincingly: his fervour was feigned; Lily only smiled.

"Oh, daddy, daddy! All the wealth of Liberia's vegetation and undiscovered minerals would not compensate me for the joy of a crowd, the happiness of the Strand after dark, the long, long reaches of electric-lighted thoroughfares.

Mr. Summerton gave up his self-imposed task of persuading her that Grand Bassa was a desirable home. "What is to become of the girl?" he asked his wife in a tone of heart's love and tenderness.

The scene with Jack was still dominant in Lily's memory when she received a letter from him. She kept the envelope long unopened. Then she read it with deliberation. The words ran:—

"MY DEAR COUSIN LIL,

"You mustn't mind me. I was a fool, and I am only sorry that I didn't recognise the fact before I caused you so much pain with my ridiculous persistence. But I was badly knocked over that afternoon, so don't mind my grumpiness at parting. Of course, your decision must be a sensible one, or it wouldn't have been uttered. I ought never to have been born, none the less. From childhood I had thought that you cared for me, and until Benson came to Bassa I deemed it possible that I should have all the wooing to myself. He isn't a bad chap—for a white man.

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We agreed to leave the whole thing in your hands, and he kindly cried off for a month. I have written to him this morning, telling him to go in and win. Until I met him I never gave these Englishmen a serious thought. A literary fellow like him always seemed so dreary to me; but then, you see, I've lost my taste for books, and I never cared for *belles lettres* at any time. I read a poem of Benson's in one of the English magazines some months ago—something about 'dewy stillnesses' and 'pastures fringed with ribbons white'—and since then I have always thought of him as an old woman. Don't mind my opinions. Of course, I'm an ignorant ass. I won't bother you any more about that matter; but when you are a great English lady I hope you won't forget that Liberia is the dearest little spot on God's earth. If I can serve you in any way don't hesitate to tell me.

“JACK.”

He was still prepared to care for her then, although he believed that she was forsaking her country to follow strange gods. How typical these broken sentences were of his impassioned yet tender nature! She drew her breath in quick gasps. “Dear old boy!” she whispered. And for a long time she sat before the table thinking of her happy childhood. Then she wrote him a short reply:—

“You are a good fellow, Jack. I acted very ungraciously towards you the other day, but you must forgive me. I want your friendship always. Come and see me whenever you wish.”

It was not until three weeks later that Benson

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stood at the garden gate in Buchanan. He had adhered strictly to his promise ; the month had passed. Jack Summerton's letter had surprised him by its suddenness ; but the result was what he had fully expected. Several times Mr. Wrigley had asked him to make it convenient to visit the farm. Frank had seized the opportunity offered by Jack Summerton's final withdrawal from the suit. The agent gave him three days' liberty in which to report upon the trade. The actual work had gradually diminished with the advance of the rainy season, and Summerton was now giving his attention to the planting of rice. Lily's greeting was entirely without embarrassment, and she seemed to have lost somewhat of her ancient air of intimacy.

They had late breakfast together in the old room, and Summerton was intensely pleased to have the young journalist with him again. Lily's mother still looked pale and wan, and it was obvious to an impartial spectator that Death had laid his icy hand upon her. From time to time the negro looked across the table at her, and his eyes were full of perplexity. These are the trials of the great change. To see the bodily presence of our beloved mortality put off little by little its accustomed aspect, and gradually attire itself in the fearful garments of the grave. To witness the change from the ruddy familiarity of health into the awful elements of decay. Immediately the table had been cleared she ascended painfully to her room, and Benson could hear her gasping from time to time.

And now Lily became more of a surprise than

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ever to Frank. Her life had been so cramped, that it seemed incredible she should possess so much knowledge upon different subjects. Whatever items of information came in her way she eagerly received, and she seemed to have the ability of easy digestion. Conversations that Benson had deemed trivial at the moment remained in her mind, and extracts were quoted with marvellous accuracy. Everything that came to her was utilised to advantage.

She had still her parcels of magazines from England, but she had gone in for heavier reading since Benson's advent into their family circle. These books she made to add to her store of general information. Benson was piqued to find that she showed no inclination to read what he had himself written in Manchester. He wondered whether this nonchalance arose from a desire to puzzle him, or from pure naturalness. Finally he determined that the latter was the correcter opinion. He knew that Lily could not keep secret from him her feelings upon literary subjects for any length of time.

For one who professed to have a wide and optimistic outlook upon life, Frank Benson could be easily moved by trifles. Lily's novel self-possession and slight coldness in his presence did not serve to raise his spirits. The day had become suddenly damp, cold, brumal. But when the evening approached, and the sea had drawn on her garments of silver and blue, she took him upstairs to the organ-room and sang to him. Under the friendly influence of the music she relaxed, and soon they were talking in the old intimate way.

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Lily's voice charmed him greatly. He had always had the tendency to like things which other people condemned. As he listened to the sweet but weird singing he admitted that her methods were not completely to be vindicated. But the effect upon his mind was electrical. When he parted with her at the head of the stairs he felt her fascination to have grown.

The next day a bazaar was organised in honour of a visit from the Bishop of Monrovia. A concert was to be the crowning feature of the effort. Frank received a courteous invitation to recite. He accepted only when he heard that Lily was to sing. The Church dignitary was a notable person; so a new frock had to be donned for the occasion. When the girl appeared before Benson in pale amber and white he cried out rapturously. His opinion had been asked in the arranging of the programme, and he had selected such songs for Lily as he knew she could sing most passionately.

They had to walk to the Government House, at which place the concert was to be held, and a boy preceded them with a lamp. They walked slowly, as the moon was frequently obscured behind a bank of clouds. But the trees were fragrant and the night very fresh.

"What do you think of England to-night?" asked Benson, as he plucked a wayside blossom duskily shining among the bush.

They were in no hurry, and loitered by the roadsides. Lily laughed a little. "I had forgotten it for the moment," she said merrily.

"If you were in London or Manchester now, you would be yearning for Liberia, I know."

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"Maybe," she said in a musing voice. "But how little of suffering would upset the placid beauty of the night! You need only be harsh with me for a moment, then all would be dark. Now in England there are countless distractions to cover the anguish and the pain."

"It is strange how alike we are in temperament, Lily. I have been the willing slave of town life as much as you would possibly be. But I became satisfied at last."

"Are we alike?" she asked. "Sometimes I think we are totally dissimilar. The likeness is really very indefinite. But we are in sympathy with one another on a great number of subjects. I feel your changes of mood so quickly. We may be laughing together over something, and everything appears so beautiful. Then, quite suddenly, I feel that something has sprung up between us. I look at your face. The thought is written there: you too have felt the change. Haven't you noticed?"

Benson took her hand in his before he answered. The lights of the concert-room were glimmering just ahead. "You are a sensitive little girl," he said, with a half-laugh.

"And yet on the surface, how different from each other we must be! You are an educated Englishman—a man of letters. I am a primitive Liberian girl, born of negro ancestry."

A moment later they entered the hall, and Lily joined her friends near the platform.

CHAPTER XIII

A LOCAL EVENT

“If thou seest anything in thyself which may make thee proude look a little further, and thou shalt find enough to humble thee”

ALL Grand Bassa county was present. The visits of the Bishop were not frequent. He was an old man, with patriarchal beard and large spectacles. The platform was occupied by several local merchants, and Benson looked from them to the assembly. The faces were nearly all familiar, though many were of residents belonging to the outlying towns. They all smiled upon him, for Frank was deservedly popular.

The preparatory stages of the entertainment were amusing, owing in the main to the officiousness of certain busy Church people. Benson smiled his contentment as he realised the improvement which his ease manifested. Under his old restlessness he would have been impatient, miserable. When his name was called he ascended the platform with the pulse of a child.

He recited “The Death of Eva,” in prose, from Mrs. Beecher Stowe’s famous novel. At first his voice sounded weak in the great room, but as he continued it gathered volume. The wild, plaintive pathos of the description admirably suited his voice, and murmurs of approval followed his

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impassioned periods. When he had finished there was deafening applause. The whole house insisted upon an encore. He gave them "The Slave's Dream." But his impressionable voice broke on the last lines, and they cried for him again in vain. He was at the door, watching the silent stars.

He re-entered the hall after a time. Most of the songs were of the sickly sentimental kind, and sung by ladies of doubtful musical ability. They were followed by men with voices like undeveloped thunder, who chanted belligerently of the sea and the storm. Sometimes a less ambitious youth would sing of his home in far Kentucky, and Frank would inwardly acclaim the words as genuine and sincere. Lily's turn came about nine o'clock, and then his interest increased. She sang "She Wore a Wreath of Roses" with deep pathos, and many eyes grew moist as the words wailed out—

*“. . . I saw her but a moment,
Yet methinks I see her now,
With a wreath of summer roses
Upon her snowy brow.”*

Excitement had made her voice rounder and fuller, and the audience was appreciative. Her second song was "Comin' Through the Rye." Frank thought her a sweet embodiment of purity in her amber dress with its filmy white trimmings. She put an abandon and a grace into the lilting Scotch lines that might have made one question where this fragile child, so apparently young and innocent, had learnt the lesson of love. The contrast to the earlier part of the programme was most refreshing, and Frank felt glad that he had come.

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He rose after the closing prayer of the Bishop feeling at peace with himself and all the world. But his mood suddenly changed. Lily stood near the platform talking with a group of people, and among these he espied Jack Summerton. Lily was laughing pleasantly at something her cousin had said, and presently she withdrew in his company to an unfrequented corner of the room. Frank was more displeased with himself for letting a trifle like this upset him, than with Lily for being the cause of his disquiet. Had he heard the conversation he would not have frowned so heavily.

Jack's face had lost its smile as he sat down by the side of his cousin. Neither of them spoke for a moment or two, and the young negro cleared his throat uncomfortably. He stared moodily at the door, where Benson stood waiting.

"I got your letter," he said, "and I shall try to be friendly, just the same as ever."

"Yes," said the girl; "I am glad of that, Jack."

But after having delivered themselves of these two very commonplace remarks a deeper silence fell upon them. Lily glanced hesitatingly at the slowly emptying hall, and wondered whether more concentrated uneasiness could be crowded into a few minutes. Frank was obviously becoming impatient, and he was looking towards her with a question in his eyes.

"That fellow seems to haunt you yet," said Jack savagely.

"Cousin Jack"—she leaned forward, and said in a voice that she could hardly recognise as her own

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—“if you persist in speaking slightingly of Mr. Benson I shall never look at you again.”

He lifted his head and stared at her in amaze. Such an outburst of anger was unusual. Then he turned away again.

“All right. I shall remember that. It means that I need never come to Buchanan again.”

She wanted to take him by the arm and tell him that his prejudices were absurd, that Benson was a dear friend of hers. She wished to tell him that she cared for him still, but that somehow Frank Benson filled her heart more fully. How could she send her old playmate heartlessly away? But there was something that resembled admonishment so much largely written on his face that she felt warned. He had something more to say. “You don’t mean that surely,” she whispered lamely.

Jack’s face softened a little. “I am sorry for you, Lily; and I didn’t mean to hurt you.”

“What *is* the matter, Jack? Why should you be sorry for me? I thought you had forgotten all that happened a few weeks ago. Why won’t you be friends as before? You are so strange, so peculiar. You almost frighten me.”

“Don’t think of me at all, Lil. I’m disappointed and sore, that’s all. But I must see fair play. I can’t recognise the fun of a man’s fooling about with a girl if he has no intention of marrying her. Damn these white men!—seducing innocent girls and then deserting them without a qualm. You had better be careful, Lil. That is all.”

So these were his thoughts? The hot blood suffused her brow, her cheeks, her neck. She felt wounded and ashamed. But she could not take

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offence. He had spoken the truth ; no white man within her memory had honourably married a native or a Liberian woman.

“ You don't understand, Jack. Why won't you see that I am different from other girls ? I know there have been many scandals in Bassa. But Mr. Benson and I are friends. Oh, Jack, Jack, you cannot say that you are permitting such a base doubt to stand between us ? I trusted you, Jack, and thought you loved me.”

“ Poor Lil ! ” he said more gently. “ I shall come and see you to-morrow. Forgive me for my bitterness. Good night.”

Haunted by her cousin's suspicious and changed manner, she joined Benson at the door. It was a beautifully clear night now : the moon had sailed out into the open sky. The stars were numerous and bright beyond their habit. The breeze came gratefully from the sea, and there was ever the sonorous plash of the waves upon the beach. The birds were still relentlessly moving in the trees, and ever and anon a leopard coughed in the bush. Then came the elusive sounds of voices from the roads as the people wended their homeward ways, and anon little ripples of laughter. They wandered by quiet paths and unfrequented grass-plots.

Many thoughts were agitating Benson's mind. He was jealous, and if he could be moved to jealousy he must be seriously in love. Lily had always been recognised as the only girl whose beauty stirred him. But his lifelong celibacy had made his wooing tardy, indolent, inactive. It amounted to this : if the actions of Lily were of such importance to him as to render him suspicious

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of her movements, he must quickly obtain the right to protect her. To-night he felt too offended to propose; but he would not return to the Atlantic House until he was the recognised lover of this little Liberian girl.

They grew tired of their wandering at last, and returned to the house. Supper was laid, and Mrs. Summerton had regained a little of her wonted colour. Frank helped Lily to remove her cloak, and her hair gleamed brightly in the lamplight.

"Aren't you rather late?" asked Mrs. Summerton. "The Thomsons passed the house half an hour ago. I suppose you have been for a walk. Joe and I have been wondering how the concert went on. I badly wanted to go. We heard all about your part, Mr. Benson. But we want to know how Lily sang."

Benson stood at the foot of the stairs. He cried out as he ascended, "She did wonderfully well. 'Comin' Through the Rye' was the success of the evening."

"Well done!" said Mrs. Summerton in great delight. "The Thomsons are always so cold. The fairest flowers in our garden are always 'just passable' when one asks for an opinion. But I was sure that Lily had succeeded."

Frank was moving about his room, while one of the boys lighted his lamp. He heard no more of the conversation. A few minutes later he was seated at the supper-table. Mrs. Summerton always talked extensively when she felt well enough, and it was hard to resist the impulse to indulge in repartee. Benson's earlier vexation partly disappeared; and he found himself laughing over the

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items in the programme as he described them at length. Then there followed a crowd of questions about English pleasures, and he was involved in an enthusiastic delineation of theatres and music-halls, concert-rooms and singing-academies. They listened admiringly, and Summerton began to talk upon matters nearer to him. He praised liberally certain of Frank's local articles, declaring that the young Englishman was on the way to fame. Benson made a deprecatory gesture.

"Don't mention notoriety or fame," he said almost irritably.

Once or twice he had realised that Lily was unaccountably silent upon the matters under discussion, and he was conscious of her keen regard from time to time. He felt unduly embarrassed. Had she guessed his intentions, and was she anticipating his offer? The thought displeased him.

"Why?" she now asked suddenly. "Surely to be somebody of importance is a great thing."

"Nothing can be dearer to the heart of a man who cares for his work than to be loved and admired by the public. But there is another side to the subject. This is criticism. There is real, sound, honest review, I know; but a well-known author is always being misrepresented and misunderstood. All his faults are posted to his debit in the ledger of his country. Now he is flattered; now censured; now praised; now vilified. He has no leisure. He is talked of to such an extent that calumny results oftener than justice. He is ever being unfavourably reviewed by those officious persons who can create nothing themselves,

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but are always ready to point out the imperfections of better men. His name is maligned——”

Summerton's eyes were twinkling with laughter, and Frank returned him glance for glance.

“Has something upset you, my lad?” he asked, with mock sympathy. Then turning to Lily he said, “What is that English expression which the lady writers use so often? Oh yes, the hump. You have the hump, Frank.”

Benson laughed. “Yes. Whole volumes might be written upon the psychological origin of the hump. Perhaps in the present case it can be ascribed to the cause given by Kipling—laziness.

*“The camel's hump is an ugly lump,
Which well you may see at the Zoo;
But uglier yet is the hump we get
From having too little to do!”*

I shall do some work to-morrow.”

There was a general smile, and then silence for a space.

“Fame is a glorious thing,” mused Lily. “Think of the power of the orator. He draws by his impassioned words the hearts and souls of the multitudes, and stirs them by the finer impulses of his inspired imagination.”

“The statesman, too,” said her father. “The country depends upon him for political encouragement and assistance. Or the soldier leading his nation on to victory and winning the admiration of the millions by his bravery.”

“If I were not a maker of books,” said Frank, “I should envy most the scientist, the analyst, the prover. He invents something which blesses not

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only his generation, but infinite races of future men."

Lily's cheeks were flushed with the ardour of her thoughts. "The sculptor or painter whose works are preserved with reverent care and worshipped through the centuries possesses a glorious fame. Then there is the actor and actress who, with a genius second only to that of the dramatist himself, gives to his noble thoughts adequate expression and movement. And Frank's cynical remarks—which he doesn't really mean—about authorship are wrong. The writer's fame is the best of all. His words compel the sympathies of the hard-hearted and bring laughter bubbling up into the mouths and eyes of the dullest."

Summerton turned to Frank, and said with something that was well-nigh authority—

"And now that we have all had our periods, withdraw your first statement."

"No, Mr. Summerton. I love my work, and I have a boundless admiration for all genius. But my contention regarding the worries and unhappinesses of fame remains unaltered. There is far more suffering than joy to be obtained from eminence in any field of creative thought."

He paused. Then he continued solemnly: "But—strange paradox—no *true* worker can lay down his task. As Ruskin once wrote to Frank Norris, 'If you are actually called, my young friend, you will die with a pen in your hand.' And so indeed he did."

CHAPTER XIV
ONE DAY NEARER

“A vastness maketh rich my soul”

WHEN supper had been removed, and Mrs. Summerton had retired to bed, Lily brought out her father's cigars, and he sat near the open window smoking. Benson chatted with him for a few minutes. The sky was still bright and luminous and the air cool and tranquil. Lily was still busy at the sideboard. He went to his room after excusing himself and took out his manuscripts. This present article he had been engaged upon for the last few days. He read over the last passages critically—

“The Negro stands essentially in need of industrial education and a sense of higher, purer, nobler culture. Fully ninety per cent. of the negro race throughout the world, it is computed, must presently be engaged in some form of manual labour, and the great regret is that during the whole of his long industrial apprenticeship the black has not learned that nice adaptation of means to an end, or mastered his environments in a degree sufficient for him to claim prominence in the world of thought. In Liberia the negro is at home, and every man should be employed in a profitable pursuit. But

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industries, apart from the cultivation of the country's more insistent produce—palm oil, kernels, coffee, and piassava—are undeveloped. The Liberian is dependent almost wholly upon Europe for the requirements of civilisation."

He worked actively for half an hour. There were many figures to consult, but he scribbled a few stray thoughts before he laid his sheets aside.

He often wrote at random. But he knew now as he closed the drawer in which he kept his papers that the essay upon "Negro Development" would be influenced by the events of the morrow. There came a knock to his door, and he opened it in some surprise. It was Lily.

"Daddy has thought of visiting the factory to-morrow morning. He has just caught sight of the steamer's lamps outside the harbour. Mrs. Wrigley and her daughter will, no doubt, be on board. He asks you to write, if you have any message, to your agent."

"No, I shall not write. In another two days I shall be returning."

Again he noticed the same watchful expression in her eyes that had unnerved him over supper. "Did you see my cousin Jack at the concert?" she asked.

"Yes—from a distance. He is well, I hope?"

Lily laughed lightly, and pulled a petal from the flower at her breast. "You English people are so funny. You generally mean only half of the words you say. There was a most ominous frown on your face during the whole of the time I was talking to him."

Benson ignored the remark. "You sang very

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prettily, Lily—better than I have heard you for a long time.”

“The people didn’t care for it much.”

“My dear child, what do you expect? I thought they showed a fair degree of intelligence. ‘She Wore a Wreath of Roses’ is not the kind of thing they go wild about in Bassa. Had you sung ‘Hullo, ma Baby,’ you would have had no reason to complain about scanty applause.”

They heard Summerton fastening the front door, and she turned towards the other staircase. “Oh, by the way, every year my father goes into the interior seeking ivories. You should have some big game shooting, Mr. Benson. There are magnificent elephants to the northward. I will propose you to dad as a companion.”

He thanked her, and for long after the house was silent sat watching the stream of moon radiance upon the waters. His feelings towards Lily remained unchanged. In the first fervour of his passion nearly a year before he had deemed it possible that the fire would burn out, the sentiment disappear. The barriers of caste between them had then seemed insuperable. Now they were non-existent. The experiment of rest and change, which had begun when he sailed from Liverpool in the summer of the previous year, was surely a success. Lily would crown his happiness when he married her. For he would not admit that there were any social differences of moment. Lily and he had always been companions, lovers of the one kind of mental food. He wanted a companion in his home, not an image to be worshipped from afar. What mattered that her skin was darker

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than his own? The girl understood him, as no woman since his mother had ever comprehended his moods, and she seemed to have an appreciation of work done for work's sake alone.

And so he sat and dreamed of the future. He had left a few blank sheets on his desk, and these fluttered helplessly in the gusts of wind from the outside air. Half unconsciously he put them aside, and turned down his lamp. The future appeared unusually bright, and he took up his pen thoughtfully. An idea was in his mind, clear, precise, imperative. He must write it down. It might die away, as such thoughts sometimes do.

He headed his sheet "The Reason." Then he smiled as he wrote the lines, eagerly and cautiously :—

*" A vastness maketh rich my soul,
And all around I know 'tis spring;
I sense the universal whole,
And grandly learn my song to sing,
Because—*

*" The riddle of my heart is guessed,
The intricate hath found a key;
I see the fair, and know the best,
I have the strength and subtlety,
Because—I love you !*

*" I feel a tenderness at heart
That was but gentle heretofore,
That once was lonely and apart,
But now is perfect evermore,
Because—*

*" Shadows that wrapped it like a shroud,
And hid its secrets from my view,
Flee swiftly like a morning cloud,
And soft as early autumn dew,
Because—I love you !*

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*"The pathos of a weary dirge
Once was the melody I heard;
But now the thunders round me surge
Of the world's heart to music stirred,
Because—*

*"And with those organ tones I seem
To blend the stops of coming years,
The crashing sweetness of a dream,
The diapason of the spheres,
Because—I love you!"*

It was in the early hours of the morning that he retired to bed. The moon was still flooding the room with light. There was the sleepy cry of the pepper-bird and the black cuckoo from the trees, and soon a cock began to crow lustily. He lay for some time musing over the incidents of the previous day and murmuring scraps from his poem that might need a little improvement ere he despatched the manuscript to London.

*"The pathos of a weary dirge
Once was the melody I heard."*

He murmured the lines dreamily. From above him came the shuffling of feet, and he heard Summerton crying a cheery "Good morning" to his wife. Then the door was opened, and Frank saw him swinging down the path. He closed his eyes and slept the sleep of the weary.

It was late before he rose. His resolve had grown, and was confirmed by his few hours' sleep. During the late breakfast he kept a careful watch over Lily's movements, and he came to the conclusion that she would accept his offer. She appeared to avoid him a little, and yet was thoroughly intimate. And again he found her

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regarding him with that strange look of interest and questioning, which he had noticed only since the reappearance of Jack Summerton.

A note arrived for him from the Atlantic House. The carrier was his own steward boy, and he opened it in some perturbation. He did not wish to leave Ivy Cottage until his project had become a realised fact. It was in Mr. Wrigley's well-known handwriting, and ran :—

“MY DEAR FRANK BENSON,

“My wife and daughter have just arrived, and present their compliments to you. We hope you will be with us soon. Mr. Pyne was a passenger on the same boat, and your fellow-journalist is having breakfast with us. He is bound for Swakopmund, his second trip in the *Hans*. Summerton intends sending him down to see you this afternoon. I hope you will have an enjoyable time. Regards. “R. W.”

Frank sent the note upstairs to Mrs. Summerton, and the good woman was instantly on the alert to prepare for the great man's visit. During her mother's able equipments, Lily appeared to him in a new delight. She asked to see his manuscripts. For some months he had been working in a desultory fashion at a new novel. He had been compelled to shelve it owing to an enigma in the working out of his plot. Now, as they sat together in his room, he asked her opinion. She turned over the sheets quickly.

“What is your chiefest difficulty?”

“How to dispose of my heroine. The story will work itself out some day, if I leave it alone.”

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“Oh, but that seems idle philosophy. I see that you are up to the eighth chapter, probably one-fourth of the book. Are the other parts written in skeleton?”

“Only very roughly,” replied Frank. “I have given those chapters considerable attention, and have even sketched up to the fourteenth. But the story won’t move. I shall have to wait for inspiration.”

“Aren’t you wasting marketable material? Why commence to write until the plot is fully matured? You have told me several times that you will not accept payment for your work on the Liberian press. I know you are doing little else.”

Benson laughed, but he was slightly jarred. “I have told you many times, Miss Worldly-Wise, that I came to Grand Bassa for a total change of life. I have given up exhaustive mental efforts, with the habits of attending clubs and giving lectures.”

“Every man ought to receive payment for his labour,” said Lily, with an air of firmness. “You were able to maintain yourself in a large town on your literary income, and you ought certainly to be saving the surplus obtained from existence in a country place.”

“I have all I want, Lily. What does it matter that my income has decreased in direct ratio with my fewer needs? This seems quite natural. I have found more real happiness in Grand Bassa with a fine leisure than I should have derived from the most laborious exertions in England. Don’t worry. If the novel is not completed here, it shall be at home in Manchester—some day!”

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Lily was silent for a few minutes. Finally she asked, thoughtfully, "Do you think that modern fiction may be looked upon as a good vehicle of education?"

"Indeed, yes. But I am afraid that it cannot be trusted, taken on the whole. Many of our novelists distort their facts. But there are several sedate stylists among us who speak what they deem to be the unvarnished truth. Believe me, the present craze for sensationalism is the curse of our literature."

Benson spoke emphatically. He always felt aggrieved when the subject was approached. He had met a great number of contemporary writers, and he could not help but deem the majority of them unworthy of their influence.

"But, Frank, you cannot seriously recommend the old-fashioned, namby-pamby style of book? You know that it would not be tolerated to-day."

"I am not pleading in favour of the pseudo-religious novel at all." He pointed to a heap of magazines on his table. Lily had brought them in during one of her excursions. "We have outgrown the school you mention. But I distinctly deprecate the 'impossible' school of fiction. It is a melancholy but true reality, that one may be driven to madness by a too serious perusal of the effusions from the pens of certain English men and women who are professing to follow the traditions of Shakespeare."

"But are people influenced to this extent by the books they read?"

"Unconsciously, most people are; but the effect is indubitable."

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“And do you blame the magazines?”

“Only in a degree. Journalism has done much to promote literature by increasing the public taste for good reading, by frequent allusions to the works of dead and living authors, and by criticisms of books upon their publication. And since the magazine press has grown into such popularity with both educated and appreciative people, our best novels have appeared in their pages.”

“That is true,” said the girl, with some show of pleasure. “Zangwill, Barrie, Stevenson, Du Maurier, and innumerable others have contributed to the better periodicals of England and America. But you have not shown the offence of the magazines.”

“Here lies the danger. You will readily understand, however, that I do not admit any one of the authors named to be other than self-respecting artists. My remarks refer to the degenerate class of novelists. A deleterious element has crept into our current literature by means of the hurry of journalism. Literature is essentially the writing that *lives*—that endures adown the centuries and is undimmed in lustre by the passing of the years. But journalism is necessarily ephemeral: it must appeal to the passing hour, its success lies in the secret of thrill. The demand for such sensational literature is dangerous to the author who does not respect his art. This is the reason—I speak from one standpoint only, my own—why we have so few writers upon whose portrayals of character we may look with reliance. While money can be made by the easy method of distortion and caricature, an ordinary journalist-author will pander to

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his editor's wishes. His magic art is lost sight of, and puppets tread his stage instead of men and women, dull, empty, unsymbolical."

"Thank you, Frank," said Lily simply. She gathered up her papers and turned towards the door.

"I want you to go on with your novel. You shall be one of England's true novelists," she whispered, as she passed him by.

CHAPTER XV

A PROPOSAL

“Because I love you ”

AFTER she had gone Benson sat looking at his manuscripts, and anon at the garden below. The hedges were full of birds—pigeons, bluejays, sunbirds, hummers—balancing themselves on the twigs with soft interminable twitters. The trees were flooded with light, and the fragrance of many flowers was wafted upward to him.

“‘Sermons in stones, books in the running brooks,’” he murmured, and played with his pen for a time. Nevertheless, he commenced to work in earnest, and had written a dozen sheets when Lily came to the door to announce that it was two o’clock. “I suppose Mr. Pyne will be here in time for tea, so I shall ask mother to have it served a little later than usual. You will go on working until I tell you that we are ready ?”

He felt greatly entertained at her effort to rule his life for him, and laughed as he observed her glancing over his manuscript. He liked her superintendence, and thought how pleasant it would be to complete the novel before he left Liberia. “I mean to finish it this year,” he said. “You have given me a new stimulus.”

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“I am glad,” she said, without ardour. But her face was flushed and her eyes bright.

“You teach well, and your words have entered deep. It is good for a man to work. But if I am to succeed I must see my tutor working too.”

“My tasks are so different from yours. However, you know that I am never very idle.”

“Do you know, Lily, that I have done more work in the last three hours than I had used to do in twice that space of time in England? And this labour was sweet—for your sake. You told me to work, and I did so at your bidding.”

Lily’s eyes were covered with her long lashes, and her cheeks were rosy.

“You overestimate my value,” she said gently. “I only told you what I deemed to be the truth: that every man should earn more than he spends. But why should you appreciate my teaching so much?”

She raised her eyes to his for a moment, then dropped them beneath the ardour of his gaze.

“Because I love you,” he said.

There was silence again. He took her hand in his, and tried to lift up her face.

“At first I worked because I was interested in the negro problem and on account of your father’s friendship. Then I began to love you, and a great tenderness came over me when I thought of the burden of your race. ‘For Lily’s sake!’ I used to say as I wrote to my publishers. I knew from the first that I should have to make this declaration to you at some distant date.”

He put his arm around her, but the girl still refused to meet his eyes.

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"To give you pleasure has been my only hope for many months. I want you, Lily. I want you for my wife. Will you come to me?"

Her eyes were raised then, and she placed her arms around his neck as simply as would a child. "I am in your hands, Frank. I always loved you."

He covered her face and hands with kisses, and they looked at each other with glistening eyes.

"I will call you soon, Frank," she said, releasing herself. "I may tell mother of my happiness?"

"Yes, dear. You must not keep me waiting too long."

Frank turned back to his work. He tried to continue the scene at which he had been occupied before Lily's entrance. Somehow the words would not flow. He sat there in a happy reverie until he heard the clash of the garden gate.

It was Jack Summerton. Benson saw him enter the house, and then there came drifting up to him snatches of happy laughter. But no pang of jealousy stirred him. Lily belonged to him now, and he trusted her implicitly.

Half an hour later he saw the huge figure of Sutcliffe Pyne coming slowly down the road. He smiled faintly as he noticed that the novelist carried unmistakable signs of an increased salary. His Colonel Kelly stories were more popular than ever. Frank washed his hands, and prepared to descend the stairs.

He greeted Jack Summerton as he passed through the parlour, and the young negro followed him on to the piazza. "Mr. Benson," he said frankly, "I owe you an apology. Lily has just told me of her engagement. At first I thought you were crying

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off, and that made me wild. Of course, I am disappointed at Lil's decision, but I wish you every happiness."

Frank responded warmly, and lingered with him for a few minutes in talk. Pyne had reached the gate, and he descended the steps to meet him. Soon they were pacing up and down the grass-plot at the back of the house. A happy smile was on the younger man's face, and the popular novelist looked at him curiously from time to time.

"What a pretty girl that was at the window!" he said, with the air of a critic. Lily had looked out as he passed through the garden, and now they could hear her laughing softly with her cousin indoors. Frank murmured his acquiescence, and plucked a large jonquil, growing in one of the boxes by the side of the path.

"You spend all your time here now, don't you, Benson? I met you in the same place during my last trip." The big man looked quizzically at his companion. "A decidedly pretty girl!" he repeated. "But she is very young. That handsome nigger appears to be rather gone on her. Her cousin? Oh! I'm rather sorry for the lad, because he seems to be head over ears in love. Does the subject irritate you? I know what a woman-hater you are—or have the reputation of being! Now, don't frown. With a suitable occasion and a congenial environment, I always find myself talking of women with a man who professes complete ignorance, but who has devoted all the years of his life to a study of the subject."

Frank made a movement of indifference.

"Now, if I had been in your shoes," persisted

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Pyne, "a resident in Bassa, I should have had several idylls and pastorals out of the affair. The heart of a woman is like one of Tom Smith's crackers. It opens with a loud report, and shows its elegant wrappings to have been only the covering of a sweet, a fool's-cap, and a riddle. The fool dons the cap, and pauses to solve the problem; the wise man sucks the sweet. But you don't often go in for that class of thing, do you? And, of course, when all is said and done, she is a negress."

Benson flushed a little. "Yes," he said gravely, "she is a negress."

"Remarkably pretty, none the less. Her eyes are very fine, and she has quite English hair. 'Pon my word, Benson, I shall make Bassa my home after I have finished with the Congo and Swakopmund. Just think of these lovely creatures, with delightfully civilised negroes around them, playing at European culture, and making love in quite the accepted style. I would give half my income for the matter that you must have stored away in your desk."

"Be content with what you have," said Frank drily. "Think of the sharks, and the fevers, and the mutinies, with Colonel Kelly in their midst, that you are picking up on the South-West Coast, and leave me my pastorals."

"All the same, I shouldn't mind being the age of that young fellow yonder."

"But you are not, so it is no use trying to make headway with Miss Summerton. You should know better at your time of life." He spoke in a joking manner, but his voice was cold. "How is your wife?"

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“She died while I was away last trip. But I hardly think I shall marry again. I tell you, Benson, my boy, when a man has taken up a hobby like mine, he cares little for home pleasures. I like the coast girls best. Your sermons—and you look fit to give me one at the moment—will not change me. I shall be a lady’s man to the end. Become reconciled to that fact. I have had three English wives, and all have been sweet but short-lived creatures.”

Frank was becoming restless. True, the man who rarely relaxes his equanimity is a wearisome companion, but he is to be preferred above the man who makes a jest of everything. Laughter was meant to relieve, not to obsess.

“Let us be serious, then,” said Pyne, with a laugh. “I’m quite interested in the little love story over there. Are they engaged? No? I shall try to help the lad after tea. Though he seems to get along all right, and there cannot possibly be a rival in a sleepy place like Grand Bassa.”

“Maybe that is the reason why he is so merry,” observed Frank, as another peal of laughter came to them from the house. “Why should he be in a hurry if he is certain of success?”

“Just so. I feel younger when I see love affairs of this kind. They bring back to me memories of my first marriage.”

He talked sentiment for what appeared to be an endless period, and Frank laughed inwardly at his egotism. Still he felt the artless confidences of the novelist to be flattering, and he listened to the eulogies of his three deceased wives in silence. It seemed almost incredible that this mountain of

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sentimentality should be the creator of the brisk, peppery little Colonel Kelly. At last he interrupted mildly—

“My dear Pyne, let us change the subject. It is all very well for a man of your years and experience to spend the afternoon in retrospect. But I have my youth with me, and the subject is rather boring.”

The novelist laughed gently.

“Oh, you young journalists! There will come a time when you will wish that you had listened to me more attentively. You are missing excellent copy, and when you have exhausted your own practical knowledge of the subject upon which you are writing, rest assured that you will have to draw upon your memory of other men’s opinions. Wait until you fall in love yourself. Then you will begin to understand. At present you are much too young.”

“Or too old, perhaps,” suggested Frank.

“Perhaps you are. Precocious people are always forty at twenty, and balanced in years about the age of thirty or so. Yes, there is hope for you. You’ll be young enough soon.”

Again Frank smiled.

“You must really let me know when you intend to marry. I shall be delighted to give you the benefit of my own experiences. Marriage was the making of me.”

“And it actually took three attempts?” asked Benson, with an excessive show of seriousness.

Pyne threw himself down on a garden-seat, and looked at the younger man smilingly. “Yes, three marriages and innumerable wooings.”

A Proposal

They saw a white frock among the trees, and a moment later Lily cried, "Tea, gentlemen, please."

"She is a strange commingling of English manners and negro bewitchments," said Frank, as they turned towards the house.

"I am inclined to agree with you," replied Pyne. "I shall enjoy my tea, I know. She is just charming."

Lily stood at the door in her white dress and sash of crimson. She had a rose at her throat. The two men ascended the piazza steps in silence. Then Frank said—

"Lily, I want to introduce you to Mr. Sutcliffe Pyne, the novelist. Pyne, this is Miss Summerton, my affianced wife."

The girl smiled prettily, and went indoors. The big Englishman stood dumbfounded.

"You are going to marry her? By Jove! what an item for the clubs! Benson, you are a young hypocrite."

He took the younger man affectionately by the arm, and together they entered the room.

CHAPTER XVI

A STARTLING EVENT

“Always there is a dark cloud over the summer sky”

THE windows were thrown open, and the breeze stirred the white cloth upon the table. It was an exquisite day, and the trees gleamed with white and red blossoms. The flower-beds were in bud, and the crumpled green leaves showed up brightly against the soil.

Mrs. Summerton moved busily about the room. She looked haggard and worn, but had persisted in preparing the meal herself. Her pride in the great guest was illimitable, and she gave him the seat of honour at her right.

“I am beginning to understand why we don't see your name in the reviews now, Benson,” observed Pyne.

Frank smiled as he took his serviette from its ring.

“Why?” he asked.

“Because you have found this place too restful for mental labour. And you have had so many other distractions.” He glanced at Lily. “Literature claims the whole of a man. If it can't have that at the moment it will have nothing.”

Frank inwardly wondered at his words. They

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were so completely opposed to Pyne's expressions in labour.

"What made you become a journalist?" asked Jack Summerton. He was sitting opposite to Lily and next to the novelist. "I like your stories immensely. But you have only been writing for about five years, I believe, and you must have followed some other profession before."

Pyne shrugged his shoulders.

"I suppose it was because I had learned the knack of telling a story."

Lily looked across at him in some surprise.

"But don't you write because you want to help the world?" She remembered her conversation with Frank that morning, and his declaration that ephemeral literature was injurious. "Haven't you any desire to live as an author? Surely you have an ambition?"

"Dear me, no," he replied, sipping his tea thoughtfully. "I only want to earn sufficient to be comfortable, and to have the deference shown me that is due on account of my magazine fame."

"Have you no wish to be read by posterity, then?" asked Jack.

"I used to have when I was Benson's age. I wrote verses then, and rhymed 'joy' with 'annoy.' But I never published them. My stories give pleasure to the man in the street. That is all I want."

"And don't you put yourself into your narratives?" persisted Lily. "I like your face, Mr. Pyne, and I have known your name for a long time. I have thought often as I read that you

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were writing merely for the sake of your publisher's cheque."

Pyne nodded his laughing consent.

"If you weren't such a charming young hostess, Miss Summerton, I should certainly take offence. But I suppose I sometimes strike a deeper note in my books. I ought really to move my readers occasionally, even when my mood has been an indifferent one at the moment of writing the passage."

Frank took his cup from Mrs. Summerton before he differed.

"Such a thing is not possible, Pyne," he said, with emphasis. "An author can never, under any circumstances, write more than he is himself mentally and spiritually."

"But don't you think it reasonable to believe that a man may be inspired with false sentiment—a temporary appearance of earnestness?" he retorted.

"No. If a poet or author would write purely, he must live purely. If his name is to endure, he must be strenuous, earnest, sympathetic. He is his own secretary, and literally writes himself into his books. And he can never put into them more than he is and was."

Mrs. Summerton was listening with interest, but she felt the conversation to be outside her sphere.

"A great book must be written by a great man, then?" asked Lily. She put her hand into Frank's, as she asked the question, behind her chair.

"Yes. If the writer is a great personality, strong and staunch in purpose, sincere in feeling, open to the noblest inspirations, an indefinable something creeps into his sentences, giving them a

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vital influence for good. This living power is so great that every reader senses it. And a sympathetic student detects the false ring of a pretender immediately the first few pages are perused."

Pyne shook his head.

"You infer with the modern schools that there is more beneath the surface than there can be in the written lines?"

"I do. It is the spirit of the author that engenders this force. The touch of genius, and that alone, lifts a book into the realms of true literature, makes it the one permanently successful volume out of a hundred published at the same time."

"Are there many authors living who come under your category, Benson?" asked the elder journalist a little cynically. "I suppose they all repose beneath the wing of *The Academy*?"

"It would be invidious to mention names. But the type of man to whom my words apply is he who writes, not with the thought of material advancement, not with the desire of being famous, but with the sole idea of reaching the hearts and minds of the people, giving them something of value something that will uplift them and beautify their lives."

Pyne tapped his knife on the table gently. "It often happens that the richer a man becomes the less he is worth," he said.

Mrs. Summerton ventured a remark. "Isn't that departing from the beaten track, Frank? Lily has read me several articles about the immense incomes of popular authors."

"It is the only way to immortality in art. He

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who fears to wander in strange ways, and who allows arbitrary rules to bind him, limits his powers of creation. The freer the method, the freer the work. The old order changeth, giving place to new! Of no use to progress is the man who copies other minds, and idly does as was done before."

He looked at Lily. Her face was turned towards the window, and he could just see the profile of her face against the dense background of the trees.

"Shakespeare borrowed his plots, didn't he, Frank? Was he not then indebted to other minds?" She asked the question swiftly, and turned her sparkling eyes upon him.

"True. But Shakespeare is admittedly more original than the men from whom he took his conceptions. Before he handled them they were as dead bodies. Immediately he breathed on them with the magic of his genius they became sentient beings."

Mrs. Summerton rose and took up the milk-jug. "I'll go and get some more fresh milk from the cow-house," she said. Benson could not help observing that she looked bent and old as he followed her receding figure with his eyes. He turned to Pyne again.

"You are successful," he said. "And I don't suppose that I shall ever have your income and popularity. But I had rather be the humble voice of one of God's individuals—as it is every man's privilege to be—than the prosperous slave of any magazine editor. Give me liberty to follow my profession in my own way, and I will reach the hearts of the people."

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"But, my dear fellow, all this is *esprit de jeu*. Don't you think you could accomplish this mission of yours under the guidance of an editor who understands what the public most care for?"

"Hardly. The magazine press is improving rapidly, but it does not necessarily follow that what is most popular in the cheaper monthly papers is true literature. I will keep a free course throughout, publishing my thoughts without any serial issue, and unhampered by the desire for a wide notoriety."

Still Pyne shook his head despondingly.

"I mustn't forget that you have written a couple of books which pleased the critics. And I daresay the better-class reviews had more to say about your forty thousand words than they have had over all my four hundred thousand. But, all the same, I wouldn't exchange sales with you. I am far more prosperous, and my work is less arduous, I'll be bound."

Benson was silent for a moment.

"I want to give to the world messages that will lighten the everyday struggles of life. My voice is weak, but it may reach the masses faintly from time to time. I desire most that my words should remove the gloom here, or add a little sweetness there; that they may give thought to the thoughtless, love to the loveless, and, above all, hope to the hopeless ones."

Lily pressed his hand.

"You don't want to be one of the 'He said' or 'They tell me' class of writers, Mr. Benson?" laughed Jack.

"No; above all I wish to retain my individu-

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ality. It is the greatest agent of power, and has rid the world of countless follies and conventionalities. The eccentric thinker is the salt of the earth."

"What do you call eccentricity?" asked Lily demurely.

"Individuality is eccentricity purified. The goal of true eccentricity is to think as you please and to defy social hypocrisies. The only danger to the peace of mind of the community lies in the character of the eccentric one. A really strong-minded person owns the control of God and acknowledges the claims of Reason—such an one is a genius. The weak-minded person recognises only the claims of self—such an one is a fool."

Pyne took up another scone. "I like your definition," he said. "For who could mistake Hunt for Carlyle, or Wilkie Collins for Dickens? It must be that only by means of a preserved individuality can a man become a master of his profession."

"It is the strong-minded people who have brought about our present improved social conditions," said Frank.

"I wonder, Mr. Pyne," said Lily, with a demure look, "whether your limited leisure permits you sufficient time to read your own books. Three you write each year, don't you?"

The novelist did not laugh. "Read them? Dear me, no, Miss Summerton, the public do the reading. I only have to write."

Frank's eyes twinkled. Anon he started. "Lily, where can your mother be? She has been gone quite ten minutes."

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Lily rose from the table and went out into the garden. The three men saw her white frock disappear round the corner-path that led to the back of the house. They talked in a leisurely fashion about the beauty of the day. In his mind Frank followed the girl to the outlying houses, where the cattle were kept, and imagined her talking to Mrs. Summerton. The mother had sat down to rest for a few minutes. Then he imagined her coming down the path, with the broken form of the invalid leaning on her arm. He rose, and walked to the window. "Lily o' the Fields," he murmured proudly.

And then he heard the patter of feet on the path. The girl was returning alone, and in haste. A moment later her white-robed form appeared at the foot of the piazza stairs. Her sash was trailing on the ground. She looked up at him mutely. Her face was terribly pale; and she tried to lift her feet to ascend. They refused to move. She trembled violently.

He dashed down the steps, and the other men followed in alarm. "What is the matter?" he asked.

Her dry lips trembled, and she whispered, "Mother—there." Then she swayed uncertainly, and fell fainting into his arms.

"Go," he said hurriedly to Jack. "See what has happened. And you too, Pyne. I will carry Miss Summerton into the house."

A few minutes after Lily had opened her eyes they carried the form of Mrs. Summerton tenderly up the stairs. She was not dead, but it was obvious that the end was not far off. Her heart had given way at last.

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They placed her carefully on the sofa, and Lily bathed her temples. She opened her eyes. "Is that you, child? Tell Frank I want him."

She lifted her head with a great effort, and looked round the room. Frank placed his hand in hers.

"Be good to Lily," she said. "Say to Joe how sorry I am that I couldn't wait to bid him good-bye. . . . Lily, Lily, kiss me, I cannot see you."

She lay breathing hard for a few minutes, while beads of perspiration stood on her forehead. Then her lips moved slowly, and she whispered in gasps, "I am so glad your happiness is assured, Lily. Good-bye, little one. Don't—forget me. God—is—very—good."

A great and holy calm seemed to steal over her face. Her head fell softly back. A long sigh came from her lips. Then gradually a solemn rigidity fell across her features. The pain vanished, and in its place came that look of awful grandeur and inscrutable knowledge which is given to Death alone. Lily wept softly as she kissed the silent lips, and Pyne and Jack Summerton crept quietly away. The dusk fell imperceptibly, and the mists crept in from the shore.

CHAPTER XVII

A NEW RESPONSIBILITY

“Do naught to others which, if done to thee, would cause thee pain : this is the sum of duty”

FRANK had a whispered talk with the novelist ere he entered the road. “I rely upon your tact,” he said. “Mr. Summerton will be greatly upset.”

“Trust me,” replied Pyne. He had a good heart, and deeply sympathised with Lily and her father in their sudden bereavement. “The steamer will be sailing to-night ; but I will do my best. Good-bye for the present, Benson.”

It was quite dark when the old trader reached home. After the first shock of grief he carried himself with fortitude—the stoicism which is an unalienable attribute of the negro. “We shall meet again,” he said calmly. He had felt a genuine and reverent love for his wife, deepened by her care of him and their child, and by her unwearied attention to her household duties. But he accepted the fact of her death as an inevitable decree of the Almighty. He performed the gloomy tasks which her death enjoined in silence.

Frank sat with him for a long time after Lily had retired to her room. The young man spoke

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quietly about his engagement. "Lily has promised to marry me, and I want you to give your consent."

"She told me of this a long time ago, poor Mary!" he replied. "Trust a woman for reading between the lines. I could never believe it myself, because of the difference in your nations and births." He flushed proudly. "Lily has some of the best blood of Africa in her veins. She is worthy of you, Frank. I am very glad."

"It was only a few weeks ago that I made up my mind. But I loved Lily from the first time I saw her."

"Be gentle with her, lad. That is all I ask. She is a sweet little girl, and sensitive in the extreme. Give me your hand upon it."

Frank grasped the proffered palm warmly. "I shall be a good husband to her, so help me, God!" he said.

The news spread rapidly, and at the funeral he was widely complimented. The climate of any part of the West African continent will not permit of protracted periods of mourning, and the burial took place at four o'clock in the afternoon of the day following Mrs. Summerton's death. Every business house in Bassa had sent its representative, and the dead woman's merits were discussed over tea, and wheaten cakes, and cigars. Frank felt the congratulations that met him to be fulsome. The demeanour of the Liberians present was familiarly patronising, as though they were conferring a favour upon him by showing their approval.

The party broke up about eight o'clock, and Summerton fastened the door with a sigh of relief.

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Lily sat wearily at the table, her eyes red with crying.

"Lily," said Frank, "you are not well. Come to the organ-room for an hour. It will cheer you up."

"Do," said Summerton, with a faint smile. "I will sit up a while and smoke."

All the windows of the house had been closed since the previous night. Benson opened the casement of the little dark room upstairs, and the moon splashed the floor with streaks of misty white. The air was moist, and he looked down upon the white face which gleamed faintly at the organ. "We won't have a lamp," he said.

"No," she answered, touching the keys softly. "Poor mother!" Then she grew silent as the melodies swelled out into rich cadences, and Frank sat quietly by her side.

They did not sing. Lily's voice would have broken; but they felt happier as they descended the stairs after a long absence. At the door of the parlour they kissed each other like children.

"Well, Lily, girl, suppose you go to bed? I am sure you ought to be happy. It was mother's wish. Frank, let me have a word with you. Wrigley wants you back at the factory, and I should like to talk matters over."

Lily went slowly upstairs to her room, and the two men were left alone. Before they parted for the night it was arranged that after the marriage Lily should live at the Atlantic House until Frank's future was decided upon. Summerton himself would go to his brother's family. Meantime Benson should follow his ordinary duties with the

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agent until the date of the ceremony, and the negro urged that there should be as little delay as possible. "I am a lonely old man now, and the sooner I dispose of the house the better."

Frank was not surprised to see a letter from his agent on the plate next morning. A native boy had brought it late on the previous night, after the closing of the doors, and was now waiting for an answer. It ran :—

"DEAR BENSON,

"We were greatly shocked on Tuesday to receive the news of Mrs. Summerton's death, and straightway expressed our sympathy to your host. But he seemed to bear it well, and the tidings of your engagement to Miss Lily will remove from him the responsibility which would otherwise have devolved upon him. Your friend Mr. Pyne told us all about it, and Mrs. Wrigley is delighted. Am glad to say that both she and Maggie are comfortably instated, and my daughter seems more pleased with the place than I had dared to hope.

"Your room is prepared for you, and I shall be pleased to have you back this week. There is nothing much stirring in the way of trade at the moment. Whatever arrangements you may have made regarding your marriage shall have our support, and if it is necessary for your wife to live here, I can assure you that she will be made welcome by my wife and daughter.

"And that reminds me of a perplexing affair. Twice since the departure for England of Clayton has Samie of Veytown been here. She expected

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him to return on the last steamer, basing her hopes, I suppose, upon some vague promise of the young devil's. I have had distressing scenes with her. I hear from Manchester that he is to go to Sinoe as soon as his accounts are squared up. I am almost sorry now that I glossed over his affairs. The poor girl seems almost desperate. However, I shall rely upon your tact. Do your best to patch up the matter when you are at home again—at the factory I mean, for that is home to me now.

“My family send their greetings. I hope to see you soon.

“Yours, etc.,
“R. W.”

As Frank rose from the table Lily came into the room from the garden. He determined to speak about their marriage at once. “I want it to be arranged immediately,” he said.

The girl had her hands full of blooms. She placed one in his buttonhole before she answered. “That would not be just, Frank. We must remember mother. Let us wait a few months.”

“The longer you remain alone with your father, Lily, the more will he feel his grief. I am returning to the Atlantic House to-day, and there is another young lady there, remember.”

“That is not a nice thing to say, Frank,” she said. But she looked at him quite trustfully. “I will leave the matter entirely in your hands.”

“Seven weeks hence be it then!” exclaimed Frank.

“As you wish,” she said, and kissed him gently.

Benson observed the new tenderness in her

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bearing. That she loved him fervently there could be no doubt. Her eyes were full of infinite confidence when she looked at him.

He was very busy all day. He determined to finish the section of the story at which he had been working under the stimulus of Lily's interest. Summerton returned early from the farm, which required little attention now, and Frank busily arranged his papers and books preparatory to placing them in his boxes.

"I suppose you'll take Lily away somewhere for the honeymoon?" the trader asked. Frank finished tying his parcel before he looked up. Lily was sitting at the window sewing, and the expression upon her face was entirely uncompromising. He answered hesitatingly, "I don't think so."

"But it will shortly be the slackest season of the year, and Wrigley can easily spare you. You will have to go somewhere. It is the usual thing. What do you say to Axim or Lagos? Or you might try Sierra Leone."

Benson laughed at the sheer absurdity of the suggestion. "God save us from Sierra Leone!" he murmured. Then he went over to Lily.

"Would you like to go away?" he asked. "Generally a honeymoon is an excursion from the town to a country or seaside place. But we need not bring that argument to bear upon our marriage. Grand Bassa is surely secluded enough."

"Then let us reverse the order. Take me to England."

A bright light shone in her eyes, and a little colour had sprung into her cheeks. "I want to

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see your home, and the great newspaper offices. And I want to look at busy London—the Strand, Fleet Street, Hyde Park. Then there are the theatres and the music-halls, the assembly rooms and the great concerts. Take me to England, Frank.”

For a moment he faltered. He had been in Grand Bassa over a year, and the place was a veritable haven of rest. Would the old passion for noise and clamour come over him if he returned? And were he to feel suddenly that existence could only be tolerated in town, would Lily be able to share his social duties? His sweetheart's eyes were pleading.

“England be it then,” he said gravely.

Summerton could not conceal his gratification.

“For as many years as that little girl can remember she has longed to see England. Now she has obtained her desire. You are a lucky mortal, Lil.”

During the whole of the afternoon the pretty Liberian girl talked of nothing but the proposed visit to Europe. It was marvellous to mark the extent of knowledge which her conversation demonstrated of town life. Her information concerning metropolitan matters was diffusive. Not infrequently it was incorrect, and some of her theories were quite wrong. None the less, however, was her ripple of talk remarkable. From the *Sketch*, the *Tatler*, and other society papers she had learned much of every author and actor of note, and she possessed an adequate conception of the presence of each. A subtle sympathy had placed her in touch with many of them,

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and her guesses at their characters were generally positive.

Frank listened in some distrust. He could not look forward to the journey with any degree of pleasure. True, it would be an emotional delight, such as he would not have sacrificed for untold wealth, to hold his mother in his arms again and to see his father's cheery face. None the less did he feel that ill would come of the journey.

But Lily's enthusiasm was contagious, and he sat down to write to his parents a short letter announcing his engagement. He left sufficient space for a postscript, this being for the news of his return: but he knew that the words might have been written now with confidence and ease. It was not probable that Mr. Wrigley would oppose his wishes after his unbroken term of service. He threw the letter towards her with a laugh. She read it, and handed the envelope back thoughtfully.

"How is the novel?" she asked.

"Progressing very slowly. This morning I did not get on as well as I could have wished. I will lay aside the pen until we return to Liberia. It is not advisable to force production."

"But you must not forget it altogether, Frank. Do you remember once showing me a manuscript that had not been finished, and I found it to be dated for over three years before?"

He tried to prove to her that he was right in leaving unripe fruit on the bough; but she only laughed at him.

"The sunshine will ripen it," she said, "in the market-gardener's basket."

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When he parted from her at the gate he felt instinctively that his arguments had not convinced her.

“Until the wedding-day!” he cried.

For reply she wafted him a kiss from her fingertips.

CHAPTER XVIII

OVER THE SEAS

“The fool who knows his foolishness is wise so far, at least ;
but the fool who thinks himself wise is a fool indeed ”

“THE ATLANTIC HOUSE, GRAND BASSA,
“*July 26th, 19—* (Independence Day).

“MY DEAR FATHER AND MOTHER,

“I am indeed afraid that I shall have to plead guilty to the charge of neglect. Your last mails are dated early April—three months ago—and I have only scribbled you a few hasty words in acknowledgment. No doubt my last epistle, declaring my sudden resolve of marrying, will have startled you a little, but Miss Summerton’s name has been mentioned so often in my letters that you must have seen how events were likely to shape themselves. More anon.

“Tell my friends that they need never apologise for the brevity of their manuscripts. It is sufficient for me to recognise the handwriting of those dear to me. Any letter from England, no matter how short, comes to me like a breath of the open fields in spring, and carries with it the odour of a thousand happy memories.

“To-day is a holiday in all Liberia, being the anniversary of the Negroes’ Declaration of Inde-

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pendence in 1847. The factory is closed, and not a sound breaks the silence. There is something so sleepy in the languid atmosphere of the place that I may have to make a dozen pecks at this cherry : but I really mean to atone for my long term of carelessness by inditing to you a letter of satisfying volume.

“ Well, in the first place, you may continue the announcement of my forthcoming marriage with all due pomp and ceremony. You may also inform inquirers that my fiancée is a Liberian girl of nineteen, educated, refined, and far too good for me. And yourselves need not be hasty in your condemnation of my choice, for I was at some pains to artfully enclose Lily’s photograph in my last acknowledged communication, without any remark ; and mother writes : ‘ Who is the pretty girl whose photo you have sent us ? We were not aware that there lived any *European* ladies in Grand Bassa.’ So that the case is settled at an early stage and in my favour, you see. I have often spoken of Lily, and you have both recognised those qualities which endear her to me. Within a period of three months I hope to present her to you in Manchester. The wedding takes place five weeks from now.

“ I find from a paragraph in the *Looker On* that my retreat has at last been discovered. I shall straightway renew my connection with the English press. It happened in this way : we were gardening—Lily and I (you don’t know how rustic I have become since I came to Liberia)—a few months ago, when the mighty Sutcliffe Pyne dropped down suddenly upon us. He caught my eye in passing,

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and I am sure he was as much surprised at the meeting as myself. I vowed him to secrecy, but he has the reputation of being a walking newspaper for the circulation of literary gossip ; so here I stand confessed. The result has been that I am inundated with requests for essays and what-not upon the local fetish and customs. Leisure seems to be very far away indeed. Harmley has forced a twelve months' commission upon me, and I look forward to the work with a strange admixture of pleasure and dread.

“Oh, this English language of ours ! What a subtle instrument it is ! In the hands of a master, how grand, how sublime, how pithily adequate ! But a poor scribe like me is apt to be perplexed. A well-made sentence should be so flexible that the removal of one syllable would mar its effect.

“Glad to hear of the new slippers for father made from the otter-skin sent by my boy. The leopards were not so good, and I was far from satisfied when I despatched them. But I am making atonement now. There is a magnificent specimen on the way to you, and I shall tell you how we secured it. You must know, first of all, that trade is dull about this time of the year, and we frequently close the stores at an earlier hour. Old Mr. Summerton—I only wish I may be as lithe and brisk at sixty myself!—often comes down, and we all take our rifles and sally forth into the bush. It was about the middle of the afternoon of Saturday that we came upon a cave, well behind the little native town of Belly Bon. We had been warned that leopards were there ; but were inclined to laugh at the story. When we

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reached the mouth of the den we saw at once that it was occupied by two cubs. I was in ecstasies, and anxious to secure one for training. Mr. Wrigley was almost as enthusiastic as myself, and most busily occupied with his preparations.

“It was suggested that if the father or mother returned we would be in a rather rough fix. However—rather unwisely—we all three entered and made safe the little leopards. They were soft-skinned and large-eyed creatures, beautiful and full of play. Suddenly, amidst our hilarity, a shadow darkened the door of the cave. We all turned instinctively, for the place was now very gloomy. It was the father. His eyes glowed like balls of fire in the darkness, seeming to increase in size as he advanced. We had been compelled to stoop as we entered the cave, and this fact alone saved the life of one or more of us. Owing to the lowness of the roof the leopard could not spring. It was too dark to take aim properly, but we all three cocked our guns and waited. The shots rang out almost simultaneously, and in the smoke which ensued we clasped hands and stood in breathless suspense.

“We were not attacked, so it was evident that the brute had been either mortally wounded or was dead. With a sigh of thankfulness we stooped down. We had to push our victim before us from the den before we could get out. The skin was put to ballot, and I had the honour of receiving it. One of the cubs escaped into the bush, and the other has been relegated to Summerton.

“The organ arrived safely, and I anticipate a happy time when Lily makes this place her home. She is a superb player, and her voice thrills me.

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Last night a number of Mr. Wrigley's friends visited us from the *Boulama*, homeward bound. They were from Lagos and the Gold Coast. One of the elder men had a magnificent voice, and he sang 'Ora Pro Nobis.' I was stirred to the inward depths of my being, and envied him his valuable gift. The singer enjoys the applause which is his due at the moment of exerting his power. The glistening eyes and trembling lips of his hearers testify to his genius. But the poet and the author never realise the influence of their voices in this way. They may have to wait for many years for their applause.

"I have had to leave my desk to look out of the window. The Liberians are very patriotic, and flags are flying now from every roof, and even from the trees. A number of black-faced friends are clamouring in the yard, and Mr. Wrigley is haranguing them from the piazza. This is one of the results of being popular. You see, since the arrival of Mrs. Wrigley and her daughter there has been quite a revival in the town. The ladies hold very democratic notions, and my engagement to Miss Summerton further enhances the friendly relations between our house and the Liberians. I am only hoping that they will leave my name alone. One of my lectures—you know them, hop, skip, and a jump, a scrap of verse here, quotation from Ruskin there—would be rather inappropriate to an occasion like the present one. Though, after all, I am not afraid that the Grand Bassa citizens would criticise too austere-ly.

"*Evening.*—It really did happen. I have been talking for nearly an hour, and the people were

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most enthusiastic. After they had called for three cheers for Mr. Wrigley and the firm they gave me a hearty trio. Then there came three for the Liberian press, and another three for the only white man connected with it not beyond the boundaries of the Republic—that's me. Not content with all these, there was another prolonged cheer for the sweetest girl in Bassa—that's Lily. The kruboy and Vey boys were strongly in evidence as background to their more educated brothers, and we all had a very happy time. 'The meeting dispersed at last, after the singing of the National Anthem'—à la the *Grand Bassa Mail*, non-existent!

"Coffee, the head steward-boy, asks me whether we can eclipse such a display of vigour in Manchester. What do you say?"

"And that sets me thinking where the native boys get their names from. When I first arrived in Bassa I was considerably startled to find that the names of the kruboy who rowed me ashore were respectively Jim Doe, Pea Soup, Bow Wow, Wet One, Bottled Beer, Two Cents (I call him Penny for short), Wattler, and Watercress. They all have country cognomens, but these are dropped immediately they touch white culture. I should say that, when fresh from the bush, they hear a word or combination of words which pleases their critical taste, and immediately adopt it, oblivious of the meaning. The result is often alarming. One becomes hardened after a few months, but sometimes, even now, I can scarcely suppress my amusement.

"'Ki' is the name of my valet, and this word in the native diction means 'small fish.' Thinking therefore that sprat is a suitable 'small fish,' he

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called himself by that name. He invariably gets Ki from me, though, as I cannot reconcile myself to the lines which are always suggested to my mind by the other name—

*'Jack Sprat could eat no fat,
His wife could eat no lean.'*

“Coffee is a big personage in the house, and he obtained his name in this way. Six boys were engaged at one time for the table, and as they had all just come from the bush—term equivalent to our ‘fresh from the country’—they had no English titles. A conclave was therefore held, and they each selected the name of a beverage, becoming Coffee, Tea, Cocoa, Whisky, Rum, and Gin. One of a speculative turn of mind might inquire where the following names came from (perhaps the irrepressible Pyne has been at work, as it is only since his visits that I have encountered these cognomens; for myself, I disclaim all responsibility): King Alfred the Great, Rudyard Kipling, The People’s Laureate, The Owl. Just imagine a grimy little negro, attired only in his innocence and a foot of cloth, presenting himself before you with the remark, ‘Massa, I want for be stew’-boy. Ma name be de Owl.’ I hope the *Athenæum* will one day see this—it may be esteemed a compliment.

“I like the natives immensely, and I think the feeling is reciprocated. If you treat them well, they become greatly attached to you, and would die in your service. Some of them are highly intelligent, but they generally show the greatest aversion from ‘saveeing book-palaver.’

“Am I prolix? But I threatened you with

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a long letter, and my pen seems exuberant to-night.

“The ‘boys’ are very superstitious—*ça va sans dire*. By the last steamer, and accompanying the leopard skin, I sent you a juju stick. This was presented to me as a special mark of esteem by a local witch-doctor. So potent, however, is it supposed to be that, during its temporary residence here, I had to vacate my room. None of the employees would dare touch the place until after it had been removed to the steamer. Be particularly careful that it doesn’t bite. All the Veys carry a charm, sold to them by their priests, and they reverence these little bundles with unlimited zeal. It is firmly believed that they will save the wearer from death by accident, and that he is safe from all harm, both physical and spiritual, while carrying the talisman. Curious to see what they actually contained, Clayton once opened a houseboy’s arm-bag while he slept. He found only a small bundle of dirty rags, a piece of rusty iron, and a black powder. But so enraged was the lad at the liberty taken with his private juju that my fellow-citizen had to avoid him for many days. (It was little acts of this kind that made Clayton so unpopular. Mr. Wrigley informs me that the firm are sending him to Sinoe. I hope he has not called upon you.)

“What a curious thing this idolatry is! And yet it is natural after all. Fear would seem to be the great motive which inclined humankind to religion: love being at the opposite pole. All men—barbarians and epicureans alike—want a juju of some kind, something to kiss and caress, and throw

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themselves down before in abject worship. Our Omar Khayyam Club is as much an evidence of this interest in instinct as are the bush societies of West Africa. If the idols aren't made of stone or wood, man will have them manufactured of words. The two opposite cultures are the same in essence. Both Englishman and African are answering the inward voice that cries aloud for something higher, nobler, superior. Religion is as much a part of our nature as is the love of beauty. To see a man subject himself honestly to a God—no matter whether He be the Eternal Spirit of the Universe or a hand-made or mind-made idol of Beauty Embodied—lifts one to the gates of heaven. I have watched the natives perform their uncultivated adorations, and my heart has yearned because of their ignorances. But none the less has my mind been filled with purer thoughts, and my soul with nobler ideals.

“The dusk is upon me in all its coolness and amplitude. I shall not ask for my lamp yet awhile. The gloaming is too precious. A few minutes hence I shall have fastened up my envelope, and will be watching the sea as she robes herself for the night. Dispense my love, my regards to all dear friends. Tell them of my new-found happiness. In the name of Lily I greet you both.

“FRANK.”

CHAPTER XIX

VIE DE BOHÈME

“Something new, whatever it may be”

MRS. RALPH KENNEY WRIGLEY was a lady of decidedly democratic opinions. She was the daughter of a great socialist, who had signalised his career by supporting every movement that promised to benefit the working classes. After the girl had left school she listened to her father's lectures upon the emancipation of the negro, a subject that he had taken up assiduously since a recent tour through the southern States of America. And Mary Kenney decided to put her father's theories into active practice. She became a West African worker, and had made three trips to the coast before she met Ralph Wrigley on one of the homeward-bound steamers.

They married early in the following spring, and Mrs. Wrigley travelled with her husband to Lagos, at which place he was then stationed. In this colony she spoke upon platforms, worried the employers of negro labour into a milder form of government, talked in native huts with witch-men, studied—or professed to study—ethnology, and went home to England after three years' residence on the coast to work up her material. The result

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was her one and only volume. She had none of the poetic insight of Mary Kingsley, nor the strength of moral. The negro was a creature beyond her reach, and her volume was heartily condemned by the critics. Mrs. Wrigley's literary career was over. She determined to lay the pen aside, and use that more comprehensive weapon—the tongue.

Three months after her return to London her child was born. She named it Margaret, and wrote to Lagos in a new pride of possession, "Such a pink little darling, Ralph: all eyes and chubby limbs. I will remain at home until your term of office is over; but I cannot understand how you will be able to live without seeing our little Maggie." Ten years later Wrigley transferred from the African Association to his residence at Grand Bassa. His wife made one or two flying visits, but was devoted to the upbringing of her daughter. This was now an accomplished fact, so she had yielded to her husband's persuasions, and brought out their child to Liberia.

The passing of the years had not dimmed the lady's passion for everything that was modern, progressive, new. She spent the time that was not given up to her household claims in propaganda work. Her husband allowed her 75 per cent. of his income, so that she was always in easy circumstances.

Maggie Wrigley refused to become enthusiastic upon social questions. She favoured her father, who was of a quiet, amiable disposition. Her pet diversion was cycling, and she subscribed to *Mudies'*. She never made the slightest pretence

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at being advanced when out of her mother's presence, and she chose her friends from the idle fringe of suburban London.

When Frank returned to the Atlantic House, after the death of Mrs. Summerton, he was met with cordiality by the ladies. That he was a journalist who had eagerly interested himself in the negro problem, and so far shown his contempt of social conventions as to marry a Liberian, made him a subject of great interest to the stout matron who rose to greet him. Mrs. Wrigley had many theories about literature, but little actual knowledge; and Frank found himself in the midst of a conversation before he had been five minutes in the house. Wrigley was taking a humorous delight in urging the talk into a serious view.

"Benson is a lecturer too, you know, Mary."

"Indeed? Now, how delightful that is! Because I should like to introduce you to one or two societies at home. Do you lecture upon socialism, Mr. Benson? I could easily put you in touch with the secretaries of the London halls, and you could arrange dates, pending your return."

Frank disclaimed any socialistic views. When he said humbly that his subjects were literary in the main, she looked somewhat disenchanted; but took rice from the steward with an air of interest.

"What an instructive play that one is at the Royalty! Don't you think so? But, of course, you haven't seen it. In my opinion Wilberforce was really plucky to put it on, and Pinero's fame is going up by leaps and bounds."

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"I shouldn't have thought *The Girl Who Would* deserved your praise," said Frank, with a slight smile. "I have only read the book. These advanced plays with a problem and a past are very tiresome productions. Comic opera is far more to my taste."

Mrs. Wrigley's spoon clattered on to her plate. She was surprised at the confession. All the literary men whom she had met in England avowed a penchant for Pinero. Her husband frowned his indulgent disapproval across the table.

"Frank is talking nonsense, Mary. He often does that to deceive people. He is as fond of Wing Pinero as you are."

His eyes were twinkling merrily, and he uttered the last sentence with emphasis.

"There was a delicious cartoon in the *Studio* last month, Mr. Benson. Did you see it? It is by that new artist of the Aubrey Beardsley school. The conception is magnificently subtle and convincing."

Frank had caught up the spirit of the conversation. "Oh yes," he laughed. "I remember the thing. My people often send me the art magazines. It is splashed and streaked as though a spider had walked over it, and the bodies of the man and woman are all out of proportion. Lily and I were having a smile at it a few days ago. It is a poor piece of work. I can assure you, Lily understands a joke as well as anyone, and she laughed quite heartily over the picture."

Mr. Wrigley's foot touched his warningly, but he was in a happy mood of raillery, and cared

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nothing for these admonitions. He was further encouraged by the smile on Miss Maggie's face as from to time she looked at him demurely.

An embarrassed pause ensued, while the good lady played with the dessert.

"Have you read Ibsen's latest volume? It throws a new light on the social problem of woman, and makes very good reading."

Frank only sighed in mock distress.

"No, I haven't read it. But I perused *A Doll's House* some time ago, and Ibsen will be only travelling over the same ground again." He spoke with a degree of solemnity which denoted that he was vastly amused. "After all, he only repeats the platitudes that have been expressed equally as well before. Surely, you agree with me?"

At this reply Maggie burst into a hearty laugh.

"Oh, it is so funny, mamma," she said apologetically. "You are talking shop, thinking that it will please Mr. Benson, and he is showing you that he is quite an ordinary mortal. Don't you see that he is playing?"

Frank looked fearfully at Mrs. Wrigley. That good lady, to his great astonishment, joined in the laughter, and returned his humorous glance with one as equally relieved. They drifted into a fluent chat that was made up of snatches of epigram and broken sentences interspersed with ripples of merriment. Benson felt when he rose from the table that he should be on the best of terms with his new friends.

"It is so refreshing to find you not a prig," said

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Maggie frankly, as they sat out on the piazza. "I was afraid that you would turn out to be one of those conceited people who are made up of sham and false sentiment. Tell me about your engagement. You must introduce me to Miss Summerton as early as you possibly can. I am determined to like her, and we shall be great companions."

Frank talked to her with a growing sense of intimacy until Wrigley warned them that the night air was becoming too cold.

Among the numerous letters which arrived for Benson by the next steamer he received one from Clayton :—

"Sinoe is to be my new station, old boy. Congratulate me. The 'boss' made absolutely no objection to my suggestion regarding Nellie, and we were married last week. He said that it would keep me straight. He is a terrible stickler upon questions of propriety, as you know. The wife is to sail with me a week hence. I have already booked with Elder's, and we are to sail on the 26th of August by the *Fantee*. At Sierra Leone we will catch the *Boma*, and we are due at Grand Bassa on September the 15th. These steamers generally lie in the harbour for a day, as you are well aware, so I will come ashore and introduce you to the wife. She is an awfully nice girl . . ."

For over a week from the day that this letter was handed to him at the little wooden hut known in Bassa as the post office no steamer came into the harbour from England. There were a couple of Germans from the coast, and a liquor boat from Hamburg. But early each morning, as the dim

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outline of the vessels appeared upon the horizon, Samie called at the little galley of the factory downstairs to inquire the name of the steamer. On the morning that the Hamburg boat arrived she came into the yard with her hands full of bush-blossoms. A daintier bride need never have been wished than the figure that presented itself to Benson's surprised vision. She had decked herself out in all her finery, and the many chains which Clayton had given to her from time to time were round her neck. But she looked anxious and weary behind the splendour of her smiles. It was evident that this protracted course of waiting had told upon her health.

Leaning over the piazza-rail, Frank told her that she looked unwell. Slowly she ascended the stairs to him.

"Ah! But waiting and watching make me old too soon. To-day I shall be well and happy again. This steamer is from England, is it not so?"

Out of pity he told her the day when Clayton was due to arrive. "He should have acted honourably," he said to himself in apology. "I am not bound to uphold him in his perfidy." A shade of disappointment passed over her face, but she turned away with a more satisfied air.

That morning Benson wrote in hot anger to his fellow-countryman, upbraiding him for what he had done, and demanding that some show of recompense should be made. He sent the letter overland, by way of the beach, to Monrovia, the port of call next to Bassa. No doubt Clayton would pick it up in passing. After he had done

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this he turned to his ordinary duties with a freer conscience.

Mrs. Wrigley was quickly at home with the Liberians. In Upper Buchanan existed a little society of people who maintained that they followed the higher education. Once they had approached Frank for a lecture, and he had spoken upon the subject of "Ralph Waldo Emerson." But he had returned home dimly ashamed and abashed; for it had been obvious that Emerson's name had never been uttered before in the whole of the town. With this community the matron was soon intimate, and at breakfast one morning Frank found a short note on his plate. It read almost like a command.

"You are requested specially to attend the Government House on Wednesday evening next, the 12th inst., at the hour of seven p.m., to lecture before the public of Grand Bassa and environs. The subject, we should like to bear upon our race, and the chair will be occupied by Mrs. Kenney Wrigley."

Benson smiled amusedly. There seemed to be a threat implied that if he failed to succeed in pleasing them, he might expect to lose his prestige. But he took down his books and planned the lecture most carefully. You cannot dare be flippant with a semi-educated audience. His subject was "The Education of the Negro," and the title he knew would ensure him a large and satisfactory audience. Perhaps his would be the first voice in Grand Bassa that would point out the possibilities of the Liberian Republic. He looked forward to the occasion with a degree of pleasure that both

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astonished and delighted him. Lily he had not met since his return to the house on the beach, but a little note reached him on the day of the lecture :—

“Look for me to-night, Frank. You must succeed for my sake.”

CHAPTER XX

THE VOICE OF HOPE

“Lead thine own captivity captive, and be Cæsar
within thyself”

THE hall was crowded when the party from the factory arrived, and new visitors were pouring in constantly. Mrs. Wrigley's introductory remarks were delivered forcibly. Liberia occupied an unique place in the modern scheme of nations. She had almost infinite possibilities. It behoved every citizen to be alert, practical, active.

Frank pronounced his title slowly, and the words made the old Government House to ring again—“The Education of the Negro.” The opening sentences were somewhat hesitant. Soon he gathered strength, and there was a straightforward and honest decisiveness about his words that made the people sit silent and attentive.

“Miss Mary Kingsley had one favourite phrase which she was wont to use on all manner of occasion, ‘The black man is just the same as the white man—only different.’ I may be obtuse; I think I am; but this declaration leaves me mightily perplexed. To my mind the negro is just the same as the Caucasian in his possession of faculties, powers, and susceptibilities, and in general character. He

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is a man, and is responsible for all that appertains to humanity: the multiplication table and the beatitudes appeal to him in the same way that they arraign a white man of the same degree of education.

“The functions of education are to enable the recipient of the teaching to make a living, and to become a useful member of society. In Liberia there are thousands of negroes employed in profitable pursuits, but this labour falls far below the degree of efficiency and skill which the industrial rivalry of the age demands. This is why Liberia is so thoroughly dependent upon England and Germany for her necessaries.

“How can this crude and wasteful labour be made intelligent and economic; and in what way can the Liberian be rendered self-reliant? These are the questions of industrial education to-day. To the philanthropist the means are not of such consequence as the end. Whether it is by the study of Emerson and Ruskin, or the application of mathematics, that the negro is lifted to a higher state of responsibility is immaterial, so that his mental cultivation is ensured, and that this improvement reacts beneficially upon the community. It has been affirmed with dogmatic reiteration that the negro is incapable of mastering the higher branches of knowledge, and that European culture is impossible to him. This statement has been amply refuted in our colonies. In Lagos and on the Gold Coast are hundreds of educated negroes who have mastered our general learning. It cannot reasonably be expected, however, that a whole race shall leap at one bound over the gulf which

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separates rawness from refinement, corruption from stability, barbarism from civilisation. The negro has shown that he undoubtedly possesses the requisite abilities to become a worthy citizen of the world, and a cultured gentleman; but it will need centuries of patient effort before the whole negro race can be made worthy of a place equal to that of the white nations in the march of progress."

The audience was very still. Frank was in quiet vein, and showed his fervour only in his eyes. But as he went on his manner became more positive, and he exhaled vitality. Lily sought her friends' faces, and marked with satisfaction the doubts gradually clearing away from their brows.

"There is the actional side of the question to be considered. Although the negro has acquisitive ability, it cannot be denied that he lacks the assimilative power to turn it to a practical use. This statement may appear unjust; but it is proven by the fact that, *outside Liberia*, only under the guidance of white people has the negro become prominent in any branch of learning. The question of the relative capacities of the black and white races need hardly be insisted upon. Their planes of development and social status are totally dissimilar. Behind the Aryan race lie centuries of speculative and practical labour. Behind the negro race lie centuries of serfdom and slavery, oppression and ignorance. It cannot be expected that a subject breed of men shall produce names rivalling those presented by nations which possess power and knowledge and wisdom. 'Where is the literature of Africa?' it is asked. It lies in the future.

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The Greeks, it has been long conceded, were the most intellectual people that ever lived. Yet at the present time the country that produced Homer and Plato, Euripides and Phidias, has so far degenerated as to be the pity of the nations.

*“Fill high the bowl with Samian wine!
Our virgins dance beneath the shade.
I see their glorious black eyes shine;
But, gazing on each glowing maid,
My own the burning teardrop laves
To think such breasts must suckle slaves.*

*“Place me on Sunium’s marbled steep—
Where nothing, save the waves and I,
May hear our mutual murmurs sweep;
There, swan-like, let me sing and die;
A land of slaves shall ne’er be mine—
Dash down yon cup of Samian wine.’*

“How can there possibly arise a Shakespeare among savages, a Milton among Bushmen, a Tennyson among only superficially educated and developed men? The time is coming, none the less, when Africa shall have her literature. Liberia possesses such glorious advantages over her neighbouring colonies, in that she is the home of the free negro, that a literature is growing around her like a halo. A hundred years ago it was thrown in the teeth of America that she had not yet produced one man of genius. Thomas Jefferson retorted hotly, and said that when the nation had existed as long as the Greeks had lived before Homer appeared, or the English before Chaucer was born, America would possess her galaxy of great people. How nobly this has been proved! The greatest

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names in our literature, the names that are loved and revered above all others—Longfellow, Holmes, Emerson, Whitman, Hawthorne—hail from the land of our New England fathers.”

His resonant voice filled the building, and seemed to resent the confines of its walls. A murmur like that of the sea rose from the people.

“Surely the same degree of tolerance shall be admitted to Liberia and to the negro race throughout the world? Let this Republic shield herself from reproach behind the plea of the prudent Jefferson. The nation is as yet too young to show excess of intellectual exuberance. But the fact that the negro’s artistic faculties have not been wholly smothered by slavery is amply demonstrated by the achievements of coloured people in America. The literary skill of Phyllis Wheatley and Albert Johnson, the scientific ability of Benjamin Banneker and Frank Bryne, the instinct of colour in Alice Monsang, the administrative power of Frederick Douglass and Arthur Barclay, the poetic capacity of Paul Laurence Dunbar and John Benson Biggs, the eloquence of Emmanuel Williams and Samuel Ferguson—all are evidences of the negro’s possibilities. I could mention other names equally as persuasive to the ears of the public of Liberia from the circle of my own intimates in the Republic; but it would not be policy to point too openly to the efforts of these workers. More than one senator of Monrovia would grace the administration of a white country.

“From calendars of American publishers I see that over two thousand books have been written by coloured men and women. The negro’s inventive

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talent has been proven in about eight hundred patents registered in the patent offices of Great Britain and the United States. In Liberia there are four ably edited and cleverly written magazines published periodically, and it is palpable that the instincts of the race are becoming nobler with the advance of the years.

“The negro has now reached a critical stage in his career of development. Despite the apparent friendliness of such people as have visited Africa and written volumes about him, the amicable relations that exist between the black and white races are on the decline. The connection is daily becoming more formal and business-like. It is only by means of the schools and colleges that a higher standard of excellence may be maintained and a nobler mode of life inculcated. The negro must cease to be dependent. In Liberia there are three educational institutions. Of these, two are in Monrovia : the College of West Africa, conducted by my friend Dr. A. P. Camphor ; and the Liberia College, supported by the Government. The third is at Cape Palmas, and is known as the Cuttington University. Many bright men have been produced here, and some of the cleverest people in the Republic are connected with it. To you all these will be well-known facts ; but I tabulate them to show the advantages of education.

“In preaching this gospel of the higher culture, I must not forget to impress upon the coloured youth that they cannot afford to ignore the agricultural pursuits of the country. Knowledge and its acquirement can be coupled with a manual avocation, and the moral nature will thus be de-

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veloped side by side with the physical. The surest way in which to incite a people to a good and pure social atmosphere is surely by showing them that the material demands of life are of equal importance with the spiritual. When the workman is labouring honestly, and is at the same time struggling towards an ideal, he enters upon his vocation with enthusiasm and zest, feeling the rousing influence of the joy of service and the development of self.

“You cannot be a nation of gentlemen until you have first been a nation of labourers.

“Naturally and irrevocably, it will be many years before the native population can have this joy in work. The unimaginative labourer pursues the dull routine of his task, spurred on only by the hope of food and drink, and by his master's stern commands. To him time and the hour are ever present, and one day is as like another as a week is like its predecessor.

*“To-morrow and to-morrow and to-morrow.
Creep in this steady pace from day to day,
To the last syllable of recorded time.”*

“It is, then, the duty of the educated negro to give his less enlightened brother the necessary imagination. The natives here need prospect and vista. They must receive it if the Republic is to be a permanent success. Under slavery the negro has toiled as an animal, dependent upon his daily labour for his daily bread. To perpetuate the industrial incapacity of the negro it is only needful for him to be kept to the low ground of drudgery and toil. To uplift and ennoble him it is only

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essential for him to be free, responsible, unrepressed. The man with a home, a mother-country, and social privileges to claim as his own irretrievably, is sustained by an ideal; and can consecrate the most menial labour to the welfare of his fellows.

“The white peoples must not be too impatient. If it takes twenty years to instil into the mind of an English lad, with a pedigree of good honest yeomen, the fundamental principles of right and wrong, how much longer must it take to rightly educate a black boy? The teaching of the negro is slow, but it is at least fairly sure. No reform has ever fulfilled the expectations of its projector, and the huge sums of money expended on the negro colonies have wrought greater advantage to the welfare of the human race than non-imperialists can ever dream.”

Benson glanced across at Lily. Their eyes met, and a smile crept over her mouth. Her eyes gleamed in reply. She would marry no man but him. And now he flung himself into his lecture, and the people hung on his words, and felt and saw and thought only on his words.

“An eminent American recently declared that the negro wears his education as a coat of paint, and that if you scratch you will find the rust beneath the surface. This is a prevalent belief, and in a sense it is a correct one. I shall deal with this aspect of the case in a subsequent lecture, God willing. Meantime I stoutly contend that the negro is no more reprehensible than the white man in this respect. How often do we see wild outbursts of fury and madness, mobilisations of civilised people, and demonstrations of anger in various

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sections of English home life? Does not the savage always lie near the surface? Is it not unreasonable to expect that a few brief years of schooling will do for the African that which twenty centuries of patient culture has not fully done for the Aryan? I know many negro gentlemen here, and I can safely say that they show a gentleness and a consistency of manner equal with that of my white friends. If the Aryan races, on the whole, are better able to hide their inherent savagery from the general view than the negro, it is because the paint is thicker by reason of more frequent application of the brush—nothing more.

“It can hardly be a reproach to the negro to say that if he is left to himself he will lapse into barbarism. No people, without assistance from a higher race, can lift themselves—or have ever lifted themselves—from a lower to a higher level of civilisation. The Liberian has been brought up to his present state of development by association with the white people of America.

“There has been much talk of late about the subjugation of the tropics, and our recent South African victory has unsettled the minds of many thinking men in Liberia. Whether or not this war was a just one is no question to discuss here; but this fact is apparent—the indecision of our statesmen at the time of the Majuba massacres has now been atoned for and undone. There are Englishmen who declare that a further extent of empire on the West Coast of Africa is a thing not to be desired, and in my poor opinion this show of anti-imperialism is far from being a healthy sign.

“The Sierra Leone hut tax war has induced

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many educated Africans to remark, in conversation, that an English policy, when applied to West Africa, is dishonourable. It is indeed a foolish system, that induces agrarian grievances; but because this has happened in your neighbouring colony it does not necessarily follow that we have dealt treacherously with the negro race. The successful working of our new system since these injuries have been satisfied proves the workability of our ideas.

“Liberia is a region eminently suitable for trade and commerce, undeveloped, and with almost undreamed-of mineral possibilities. But it is not essential for England to steal the Liberians' land in order to use it to their mutual advantage. The worth of this Republic to Great Britain consists in its being rich with produce of a kind which is almost indispensable to our home needs. The ethical question: ‘Is British colonisation needful to the development of the native character?’ need not be discussed here with the same amount of insistence as is applied to our colonies along the coast. The pure Liberian—immigrant American negro—is fitted for the task of educating the aborigine. Two hundred years' association with white culture has rendered him worthy of the task. We can waive therefore our moral and religious scruples. Slavery has been suppressed; petty tribal tyrannies, the principle of whose existence was robbery and the destruction of property, have been abolished; and the gradual conversion of the native to a belief in the manliness of work, and the uplifting of woman from a state of servile labour to one of natural companionship—all these have

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resulted from the Liberian form of government. Infinite care must have been expended upon the work; and before the world this little colony of freed slaves should stand, not as a spectacle of futility, but as a grand structure of noble effort and grand endeavour.

“These effects, insignificant as they may appear to modern-minded people, constitute forces for the increasing and permanent welfare of the natives, and they are an honour to the Liberian Senate. The native labour question is intimately bound up in that of the progress of the Republic. The dignity of work is the first lesson to be implanted in the minds of the aborigines, and this is their first step in social advancement. Liberia is a fertile country, and the natives possess qualities which a few brief years of earnest trial will make into a most useful working community.

“Agriculture, above all things, must be studied. The plough must be in constant requisition. Cotton, too, can be cultured; and here lies a fruitful source of revenue. The difficulties which yet confront the Liberian Government are enormous. It is true that the natives have been subjugated, but without a thorough statecraft, the organisation of railways, the installation of electricity, and the opening out of the interior, the Republic will be practically helpless. It is to the native population that the Liberian must look at the moment. Let them be turned steadily to agricultural pursuits, and civilisation will quickly obtain a firm footing. Justice for both strong and weak, labour for all—this is the foundation-stone of a natural and successful policy. Under these quieter home-rules

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a desire for improvement, more especially in the mechanical arts of life, will be felt. Your colleges are open. Ultimately the country will rejoice in her native-built railways, and her reservoirs and waterways.

“The past history of the negro does not suggest too rapid progress. Liberia will have to advance slowly. The Government has raised those who have come in touch with her from actual barbarism and cannibalism to a conduct of peace and prosperity. My firm and unswerving belief is that a policy of firmness, tempered with justice, moderation, and sympathy, with a keen outlook upon the finances of the land, will result in Liberia’s final success among the nations.”

His peroration had not been eloquent, but he finished impressively. The faces of the people were thoughtful. He had not flattered. There was no hearty applause, such as had met him on the former occasion; but the deep light in Lily’s eyes as she pressed his hand at the door testified to his success.

It was on the way home that Mrs. Wrigley made her great announcement. Maggie’s gentle voice broke the silence as they neared the house: “Mother, Mr. Benson has interested me greatly to-night. Cannot we have a paper in Grand Bassa? I am sure that it would help, and I understand this is the only county in the Republic without its magazine.”

“I’ll do it,” cried Mrs. Wrigley. “We will discuss it over supper, and Ralph and I will conduct the campaign while Mr. Benson is away on his honeymoon.”

CHAPTER XXI

RUS IN URBE

“ And so we wandered gladly on,
And talked of all things fair and good,
Too wondrous to be understood,
Yet things we loved to think upon ”

THE steward-boys had been prepared for a late return of the party from the “white man play,” and hot coffee was on the table. Little justice was done to the eatables, and small boy Ki carried downstairs to the galley amazing stories of the “book palaver” that was being talked in the dining-room.

Mrs. Wrigley was practical. She had never been a visionary, despite her efforts to shine as an authoress. But it was from Maggie that the most practical suggestions came. The paper should be bi-monthly, and have the name of *Better Things*. It should be devoted primarily to the interests of the negro race, but the inculcation of the higher education must be the great object. Mamma could run the paper as editress, and Mr. Benson must leave a supply of suitable copy behind him. Upon their return from England Frank might take a more active part in the management, and Lily could then preside over the art and music column. Papa

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would contribute articles upon the Liverpool and Hamburg markets. The price of the magazine must be nominal, and local advertisements could be made to cover the expense of production.

They were all still under the glamour of the evening's events. Benson promised three or four articles before his departure from Grand Bassa, and admitted that he had several poems in rough draft. Even young Jack Summerton had his appointed place. He wrote excellent English, terse, plain, unvarnished, and could talk pleasingly about local events. Before midnight the first issue was almost completely planned, and the next few days passed in an intricate medley of printer's proofs and soiled manuscripts. The press they had bought from Monrovia, and new founts of type had been secured. Thus, the first issue was on the market a full three weeks before the date fixed for the wedding of Frank and Lily. There was in none of the contributors' minds any foolish idea about the importance of his work. Benson alone knew that his matter would command a price in London that would have astonished the purchasers of *Better Things*. But, none the less, he looked at his article upon "The Gri-Gri Bush in its Relation to the Liberian Statute" with a thrill of pride. Was not Lily's name next to his, above a dainty column of whimsical talk about the art magazines?

August had almost run its course. The days were often wet and humid, but there was an ever-changing beauty in the place. Frank looked forward to his marriage with a degree of pleasure never felt before.

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When the *Boma* arrived, outward bound, she was three days overdue. Under the scrutiny of the glass Benson read her name long before she had anchored. Almost instantaneous with the long boom of her gun he saw Samie of Veytown approaching by way of the beach. She came panting up the stairs in happy haste. "He has come, then," she cried eagerly.

To-day the baby was not in her arms, but she seemed to be dressed in her best silks, and had apparently recovered all her youthful vivacity and charm. He counselled patience, and pointed out to her the indiscretion of such haste. Mr. Clayton would be ashore soon, and he would then deliver all the news to him. Meantime it would be advisable for her to remain at home. He spoke reluctantly, and inwardly hoped that he would not be present when the meeting took place between Clayton and the girl whom he had wronged.

But half an hour after she had left the house the boat-boys brought him a hastily scribbled note from the steamer. "I'm afraid that I shall be unable to come ashore, and what you have written to me is not very encouraging. I had a touch of fever in Monrovia, and I must recuperate a little before I land. I am sending my wife to you in the care of the captain. . . . Hang it, Benson, I never dreamed of a development like this. Help me out of the scrape. I am enclosing five pounds for Samie, and hope that you will be able to fix the palaver for me."

During the greater part of the morning the whole of the occupants of the Atlantic House were in the town on business connected with supplies of

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provisions. About noon the Wrigleys proceeded to Buchanan to visit the Summertons, and Frank returned to the factory alone. The house-boys informed him that Samie had called twice in the hope of seeing her white "husband." His heart ached for the little thing, as he remembered her anxious face and piteous smiles.

He lunched alone, and had just retired to his hammock on the verandah for a smoke, when she came in again, breathless and hurried, as though she had been running.

There were no smiles or words of greeting. Each seemed to understand the import of Clayton's absence. He placed a chair for her, but she refused to sit down.

"I think so my heart be sick. I get pain here."

She placed her hand passionately on her breast. There was another conscious silence. At last Frank took Clayton's letter from his pocket, and said gently—

"He is not to remain in Bassa; his station now is further down the coast. His wife will be here soon, and he seems to be very happy." He did not look at her, and his voice was purposely merciless and hard. "He has sent you. . . ." The words would not come; this seemed the hardest blow of all. Anon he concluded with precipitation, "five pounds in English money to show you that he has not forgotten you."

She seemed incredulous. "His wife? Happy?" she murmured gaspingly. "I no savee how this thing be. Am I not his wife?"

"My poor child."

"How can he be happy suppose I no live

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with him? And how—how—can I be—happy—suppose——”

Her head drooped.

“Do he know that I have a baby?” It was her last hope, and Benson could not bear to look into her frightened eyes.

He answered with his head down. “Yes, he knows. I have told him all.”

She reeled as though he had struck her. The woe in the girl’s pretty face appalled him. He caught her as she fell, and carried her gently to his room. Her head had fallen limply on to her shoulder, and the anguished eyes were closed in an alleviating unconsciousness.

Some minutes passed, during which he leaned over the piazza-rail in a distress that was both genuine and sincere. Then he heard Coffee calling across the yard, and a hearty voice saying, “Upstairs, upstairs, Mrs. Clayton. This is not the first time that I have visited the factory.” It was the cheerful captain of the *Boma*, and a light trill of laughter answered him, accompanied by a few murmured words. Footsteps were ascending the stairs. The windows of Benson’s room looked out on the piazza, but he drew chairs forward, and waited to welcome his friend’s wife.

She was a breezy English girl of the comfortable middle class, full of life and movement, healthy and undeniably pretty. She came on to the alcoved balcony with a breath like that of country lanes.

“Mr. Benson? I am so pleased to meet you. That’s conventional of course; but I mean it. We are like old friends. Arthur is always

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talking of you, and I have read your stories for many years."

He greeted them with diffidence, and they talked for a few minutes with constraint. He could perceive that Clayton's wife was intensely disenchanted with his manners. And even the whisky and cigars that Coffee placed before the captain did not serve to assure him of welcome. He looked curiously at his host. "We met Wrigley in the town. His wife is a really fine woman, and that little daughter of theirs is just like an acid drop—enjoyable, but severe."

Frank could not restrain a laugh at the quaint analogy. He was sitting with his back to the sea, and suddenly became aware of a pair of wild eyes looking at him from the window of his room. His amusement was hushed. It was Samie. She tried to smile at him, but the effort broke down woefully. She succeeded in shaking her head at him to enjoin silence. He must have shown signs of his emotion, for Mrs. Clayton turned her head and saw the little native.

"What a lovely girl, Mr. Benson! I never knew before that there were such pretty inhabitants in Liberia."

She rose, and approached the window: "Won't you kiss me, little one?"

Samie looked at her blankly. "No," she said emphatically.

But the captain had broken in with a hearty laugh, "I always thought you were a woman-hater, my boy, until Wrigley told me this morning of your engagement. Is this fair to Miss Summerton?"

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Benson frowned at him and hesitated. Loyalty to Clayton held him dumb. Whatever stories might be circulated—and Bassa was renowned for its scandal—Lily would trust him. The English girl only smiled.

“Arthur was telling me something of his amours here, Mr. Benson. I cannot wonder that you poor men fall in love with the country girls, if they are all like this one. We Englishwomen are imbibing continental notions by degrees—we are not so strict upon these matters as we had used to be. But as for marrying a black girl—why, I cannot imagine a white man stooping so low. Your case must be quite without precedent in Liberia.”

Frank had flushed hotly. She noticed his vexation, and held out her hand. “Well, good-bye for the present. I must ask the captain to take me on board again. Good day.”

She left him with a flutter of white skirts and a glimpse of dainty slippers. He remained in his chair after they had gone, harassed and worried. His fidelity to Clayton was humiliating, abasing.

Samie came to him, and remained silent for a space. She endeavoured to smile generously, but her face was like a death mask now, the lips convulsed, the eyes full of pain and terror. She slipped the rings from her fingers, and the chains from her neck. Then she held them out to him.

“They all belong to him, and I cannot wear them now. My heart tire too much. Tell him I sorry. Ah! What thing I say? No, no. Tell him I pleased, that I hope he be happy all time.”

Again her head languished upon her breast, and she tried to hide the gaudy silks that had been so

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beautiful in her eyes until one short hour ago. Her eyes slowly filled with tears.

"Thank him for me that he has been so kind! And—them English mammie be too fine. Say to him that I understand. She be all same daughter of the sun and the sea. But I——"

Benson's throat was choking. He said earnestly, "She is heartless, Samie, and, in the sight of God, you are as worthy as she can ever be." He held out his hand. "Good-bye."

"Goo'-bye."

He did not see Samie again. The news was given to him by his agent at breakfast the next morning. It has always been a mystery how the West Coast natives have mastered the intricacies of native poisons. The girl had quietly administered a narcotic to herself and the child. Her people had found her peacefully resting in the eternal sleep when the town awakened with the dawn. Frank was inexpressibly shocked. He carried himself as a mourner until the young mother and her baby had been placed in the bush. But he knew that Clayton would one day have to pay his price. For the Veys are relentless in avenging their wrongs, and Samie was of royal blood.

The wedding-day rapidly approached. Of compulsion, because of the recent death of Mrs. Summerton, the ceremony was to be as quiet as possible; and it was arranged that Lily and Frank should sail for England on the next steamer arriving from the coast. Maggie Wrigley and a Liberian girl friend were to act as bridesmaids, and Jack Summerton was to become best man. Summerton had the task of giving Lily away,

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and he looked forward to the occasion with a cheerfulness that was but lightly tinged with melancholy.

Under circumstances of a similar nature in England, it is probable that Benson would have been affronted by the many discomforts and inconveniences to which he was subjected during those weeks. There were endless visits of congratulation to the factory from Monrovia and Cape Palmas people, and whiskies and sodas were always in evidence. At the same time—although his mind revolted from the constant round of drinking and smoking—there was something so kindly and sincere in the voices of the traders, when they shook his hand at parting, that he felt amply compensated.

Sunday broke clear and beautiful. There was a gentle wind stirring among the leaves, and the air was odorous and sweet. The wedding assembly reached the church at ten o'clock. The steamer had entered the harbour late on the previous afternoon, and would sail that night. There could then be no delay in their departure for England. The ceremony passed off excellently, and the little place of worship was filled with a congregation of gaily dressed people. Benson was glad when they had left the church and the last flower had fallen at Lily's feet. This exuberance of colour did not appeal to his sense of the solemnity to which his marriage made demand.

Mrs. Wrigley had been most enthusiastic during the initial stages of the engagement, and had endeared herself to the hearts of both the young people. She entertained her guests at the house

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on the beach with infinite enjoyment: she was a warm-souled woman, and had taken a sincere liking to the Liberian bride. The agent was in high spirits. Frank's popularity reflected upon him, and this slight link between England and Liberia would bring in much of the local trade. There were only five or six special friends present besides Summerton and his nephew. The cook had made an appropriate effort, and the dishes were well and cleanly served. The wines Wrigley had selected, and they were all of the best.

Frank smiled at his white-robed wife as she sat quietly by his side. "Tell me what you would like, Lily. This is your affair, remember."

"You must select for me, Frank. I want you to take care of me."

They laughed at each other merrily. This counterfeit abandonment of self pleased while it did not beguile him. Wrigley looked down the table with an answering smile.

"You are looking very charming, Mrs. Benson," he said.

"Natural beauty triumphing over unusual events," replied the girl gravely.

"We shall have to postpone our proposed elephant hunt until your return, Frank," said Summerton, as they lingered over their cigars. "If you only remain a short time in England, we shall be able to wait for you. But you must be no later than Christmas."

Then the kruboy arrived to say that the boat was ready. It was time to say good-bye. There were tears in the eyes of the old trader. Lily had not been away from him once in the whole of her

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flower-like life. The men parted from the young people on the beach, and Mrs. Wrigley and Maggie waved a farewell from the piazza. The departure from the shore was a kind of display. Several houses had put out their flags, and a little line of friends, beyond the surf, cried out their good wishes. They reached the vessel, and Lily descended to her cabin almost immediately, and remained there until the hour of dinner. The *Boma*—it was the same steamer that had carried Clayton from Liverpool—moved from her anchorage as the dusk fell, and about nine o'clock put out to sea.

Frank leaned over the rail and sighed happily. Lily's eyes were fixed on the glooming shore that she had known as home from birth. Her hand strayed into his.

“Are you glad to go?” she asked.

“How can you ask?” he laughed. “Surely I look satisfied!” He brought forward a deck chair for her, and they sat out in the open air until the lights of Bassa had long been absorbed in the night.

Of the journey no special details need be recorded. At Sierra Leone a detachment of young soldiers came aboard, England-bound after an absence of two years. Several of them were evidently musically inclined, and Lily and Frank would listen to their concertinas and flutes in the pleasant air of the evening. Then when the moon came out fully, and a great silence reigned over the waters, they would promenade the deck in a delicious silence more eloquent than language.

Autumn in England! It was the thought of the

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beauties of the seasons in the island still so far away from them that made him censure the climate of Liberia during the rainy season. He wrote the lines early in the morning after they had left Free-town, and read the poem to Lily as the sun was setting—

- " Grey pallid dawn, forgotten of the sun,
And then high noon beneath white pools of sky,
Then sudden darkness—harsh, long night begun—
What bird could tell to bid the day ' Good-bye ' ?*
- " Dawns thus, nights thus, and never a change,
This tedious while of weeks in the mid-year ;
A butterfly in the morning light looks strange,
A birth unnatural in a world so drear.*
- " No pulse of breathing Nature beat and thrills
Beneath the narrow vault of cloud and wet,
Under this humid, acid air that kills :
An atmospheric fever present yet.*
- " But all this time I know where, too far hence,
Through earth's pure pores the year's strong life leaps forth ;
Where air is drunken with its quickening sense :
Where sky of blue is east, west, south, and north.*
- " Where ruby, blue, white blushing at the marge,
Pearl, sapphire, grey, sweet green and amethyst,
Crowded upon the sunny acres large,
Are peeping forth in thousands, sunshine-kissed.*
- " Oh, angel-flowers, whose scents, fresh, mystic, coy,
Close in the heart like childhood's earliest hope,
Give me your secret, and your gleeful joy,
Lend me th' allurements of your verdant slope.*
- " Young children, greedy for the flowers, make haste
For nosegays which the busy fields hold out ;
The world is full of flowers : enough to waste,
And as they scatter down the buds they pout.*

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*" Ah me ! 'Tis misty in Liberian towns to-day ;
Our lives lie numbed ; and yet there is for me
Some part in sunshine and bird's profuse lay,
For England's happy shores my mind can see."*

" It is pretty, but not true," she said. " You are wronging Grand Bassa."

And Frank kissed her with an almost intolerable sense of having injured her by dispraising the land that had produced so fair a flower.

CHAPTER XXII

NEW WONDERS

“We see only through and by means of the emotions”

AFTER a twenty-two days' voyage the *Boma* arrived in Liverpool. The stages were crowded with passengers. They were pouring from the other steamers in a long, unbroken stream, and all betokened a tense pleasure in their coming to English soil. Frank was eagerly watching out for his parents. There had been no time for them to reply to his announcement of his engagement and his subsequent cable declaring his marriage and return. But he knew that his mother would be prepared to welcome his wife for his sake, and he expected that she would meet them, probably accompanied by his father. It was not long before he discovered the old people, looking rather dazed amid their surroundings. He pointed out the luggage to an obsequious porter, and then walked with Lily towards them.

He felt proud of his girlish wife. There was a slightly provincial look about her, and her skin was darker than the ordinary, but she was composed and quiet. He touched his mother softly on the arm. She turned quickly. “Frank!” There was

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a lingering embrace. Then he placed Lily's hand in hers. "This is my wife, mother," he said.

His father gave him a hearty handclasp. Perhaps the busy scene around them robbed the occasion of its romance. Albeit the greetings were sincere, and the frank pleasure that now shone in both his parents' eyes atoned for the look of anxiety that had been seated on their faces when first he marked them.

"I knew that you would get home again, lad," his father was saying heartily. "We were greatly startled when we heard the news—like the old ninnies that we are! Lily will be feeling awfully confused with this noise and clatter. Where is your porter? Let us get the luggage into cabs at once, and then we can walk leisurely towards the station."

From time to time the young wife was breaking into rapturous exclamations.

"Oh, Frank, just look at those lovely horses! What a shame to have them reined in so tightly! See that pretty little boy! Is that the overhead railway you have spoken about? Oh, what a terrible noise—just like the breakers on Bassa Reef during a heavy swell! Is it like this all the time?"

"All the time—except when the night is darkest, and for a few brief hours on Sundays."

Mr. Benson had seen the boxes disposed, and now sent the porter away with a handsome gratuity. He was smiling as he listened to the happy prattle of his new daughter, and occasionally glanced approvingly at her.

"Come along, Frank, lad. Let us go. I should like to be in Manchester for lunch. You seem to have altered a little—and for the better, too." He

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made these observations as they entered the streets. There, without waiting for a reply, he monopolised Lily and walked on in front.

“How full the streets seem to be!” said the girl, as they stood on the curb of Lord Street, waiting for a favourable opportunity to cross.

“Yes—full to overflowing,” replied Mr. Benson. “One would sometimes feel inclined to wonder that the horses don’t ride over one another, and the people get lost in the crowds!”

She laughed gaily, and paused with a little gasp before a large bookseller’s window. Such a number of books she had never seen before, even in dreams.

“Mr. Benson, what——”

“Call me father,” he said promptly, and looked at her smilingly as she clung to his arm.

“Father . . . if you only knew how many years I have longed to see a sight like this you would understand why I feel so happy now. Look! There is Stanley Weyman’s latest novel, and there Anthony Hope’s. . . .”

He was laughing at her enthusiasm. They chattered merrily all the way to the station, and thoroughly understood each other when at last they stood on the platform. Frank had had a long and tender talk with his mother, but his mood was inclined to be heavy.

The moisture of the morning was still upon the carriage windows, and he wiped it away with his handkerchief. The train sped through the black tunnels near Edge Hill, and Lily was delightfully timid and dependent. Then they hurried on to a high track from whence only orderly rows of roofs and sturdy chimneys could be discerned. Anon

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they had the fields and the streams, and yet again the dull skyline and the murky streets. To Lily everything was new and strange. She was in an ecstasy of silence. Before they reached Manchester, and after the first awe of the rapid motion had worn off from the girl's mind, they were laughing together at the panorama. From the station to Eldon Green was only a short journey, and Lily's cry of delight when she saw the little house, embowered in leaves and flowers, made the elder woman lean forward and impulsively kiss her.

Over lunch they were very quiet. The young wife sat by her husband's side, and her eyes glistened as they met his.

"I feel so happy, Frank," she said softly.

"That is good, Lily. Is it because you are enjoying your first day in England?"

"I don't think that is it altogether. Perhaps because you are all so kind to me." She dropped her head with a blush; they seemed to understand, and Mr. Benson refilled her glass with claret.

"Why is it that you are all so kind to me?" she asked.

"Because it has always been the way," replied Mr. Benson banteringly. "Woman needs the protection of man, and man requires the defence of woman."

She lifted her head with a smile. "At any rate, that renders the relation of certain members of the sexes exclusive, and saves the general community a great deal of trouble," she said.

After the meal Mrs. Benson led her upstairs to rest, and the father and son were left to their cigars. Frank opened out his plans, and declared

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his intention of returning to Liberia after a rest of two or three months. He promised to make Manchester his home eventually. And the elder man heartily approved. The home-tie, the bond between town and citizen, country and patriot, is the dearest of the heart's affections. God pity that man who has seen so much of the world that he knows not where to fix his final abode! The mortal who declares that he has no home must be on the brink of beggary and hell; for the home alone is the source of character. Round the hearth is secretly sown the seed that must fructify in public; and men are what their wives and mothers make them.

Thoughts of this kind were in Frank's brain. "Yes, I will make my home here after a few more years in Bassa," he said.

It was on the following Saturday that Lily visited the theatre for the first time. The days between had been full of incident—visits to the city centres, the art galleries, the museums, the colleges, the libraries. "I have seen nearly all now," she sighed, "and the surprise of everything has been so beautiful. But," with a delightful upward glance, "you can take me to them all over again, Frank."

He shook his head in mock reproof. "To-night you shall see the crowning wonder." He turned the leaves of the *Guardian* briskly.

"What do you mean?" she asked, her eyes full of eagerness.

"Courtney has staged *A Midsummer Night's Dream* at the Prince's, and we will go to-night. Shall it be a box or the stalls?"

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“Oh!” she cried in a transport. “The stalls. I have never yet been inside a theatre, nor do I know what it can be like. Thank you, Frank. It will be splendid.”

She sat the whole night with her hand in his, happy, delighted, and sometimes a little afraid. The fairy scenes amazed her with their brilliancy, and she could not conceive how such intricate scenery was manipulated with the rapidity and ease evidenced. Her laughter at the antics of Bottom and his companions were both spontaneous and contagious. Many people looked round at her gleaming eyes, and smiled in sympathy. It was to her the most perfect night she had ever spent. They went home in a hansom, and her mind was still bemused by the music and the light, the gay dresses and the gaudy scenes. She was humming little snatches of Puck’s songs, and even when sleep had fallen across her eyes she yet murmured words of wonder and delight.

And so the honeymoon slipped by. The enthusiasm of Lily was infectious, and Frank was soon equally as much enamoured of the noises and the crowds from which he had fled two years before. He took her into the busiest parts of the city, and especially after dark. The twinkling lights and the busy hum of the traffic entranced her. Sometimes they would dine at the Queen’s Hotel, and stand at the window of their room—always on the upper floors—looking out. Towards the suburbs all would be dark; but from the district of the theatres and restaurants, the large shops and the wine lodges, would arise a glare into the sky, bright, ruddy, palpitant.

New Wonders

Here and there were electric bulbs flashing out an advertisement in letters of emphatic white and crimson. The trams and cabs would hurry by with little starry eyes of red and green, while, restlessly, ceaselessly, on the pavements flocked the people, like tiny ants, minute, eager, scurrying. The night noises were not individual. From below came one great note, vast and deep, the mingling of them all—the stir of life, the breathing of movement, the onward rush of labour. Tired of their observations, but tingling with the glamour of it all, the young people would at last retire to the table and the wine, leaving the window still open to the night.

Frank's views had always been democratic, and Lily was quite unconventional. During the course of these weeks they found themselves in many strange places; and the girl could claim to have seen more than a little of the seamy side of town life. A fortnight they spent in London and three weeks in Paris. At the *cafés chantants*, Lily saw that women of the most apparent respectability were decidedly free in their speech and gesture. But she passed through all with a laugh, quite unharmed.

There came a day when the gay city was dressed for a great occasion. The President was to receive a foreign prince, and the moment was one of great rejoicing. Confetti rained through the air. The lusty *ouvriers* and the sprightly *bonnes*, the scented *beaux* and the elegant *femmes*, filled the air with laughter. They had seats above a bank in one of the large thoroughfares. Lily was greatly interested. But her husband was quick to notice that the

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pageant itself pleased her but little. Her whole attention was centred in the crowds below ; and he almost felt, with her, that it would have been more enjoyable down there on the pavement amid the scurry and the humour, than here, seated in isolated ease, at ten francs a head.

Some mornings they spent in the Quartier Latin, and the girl would watch the little assemblies of students enjoying a *ponche* with undisguised wonder. On one brilliant day early in November, brisk and pure, Frank suggested a slight improvement in the bizarre sketch that was flourished before them as they sauntered by. At once they found themselves invited to join the party. The youthful Frenchmen were very droll in their pessimistic jollity ; and Lily laughed as they mimicked the English manner for her edification. She spoke excellent French, an acquirement learned from her father, and her dark skin half convinced the artists that she belonged to their race. A bright light had come into her eyes, and her cheeks were flushed. Frank thought she had never looked prettier ; and he felt proud of her, as of a child whom much indulgence had failed to spoil.

They returned home rather tired of their dissipations, and not sorry for the change. The midnight journey between London and Manchester reminded Frank forcibly of the day when he had left England in disgust. Then he had been more than glad to leave his native city. Now he questioned vaguely whether or not his joy at returning to his accustomed place could be a permanent one. He looked across at his wife, and his mind was made up. This feverish atmosphere had pleased

New Wonders

her because it was new and strange ; but Liberia was her natural sphere : "Lily o' the Fields." Even when he had suggested returning to Grand Bassa at the earlier stages of their arrival he inwardly doubted the wisdom of the thought. Now there could be no possible doubt nor hesitation.

It was an exquisite morning, sparkling, invigorating. The sun shone tepidly, and a baby wind stirred the white clouds that hung high above them. Manchester looked bright and clean, newly washed by a rain of the morning, and there was only a suggestion of winter in the costumes of the passengers on the pavements.

"Next week we will return to Liberia," he said.

For a moment she looked at him in blank amaze ; then she smiled wistfully. She did not dream of running counter to his wishes. "As you will, Frank. We have had a very pleasant time."

And Frank pleased himself with the sophistry that the girl was tired of town life. "She will be happier among her own people," he thought.

CHAPTER XXIII

GROPING

“There is a poison which is harmless to the carrier, but deadly to all others”

LILY was loth to part with her English friends. Her eyes dwelt upon the streets as the cab rattled towards the station, with a regret that all her smiles could not disguise. Frank watched her with a strange feeling of unrest. But he did not remark in any way upon her evident sorrow.

He had purchased a parcel of new novels for her from Christie's, and she tried to absorb herself in them until Liverpool was reached. Not until their surplus luggage had been placed in the hold of the steamer, and the other boxes had been sent into their cabin, did she make any expression of regret. As they stood together near the bridge she sighed.

“Are you sorry to say good-bye to England?” Frank asked.

She looked at him closely before she replied.

“No,” she said hesitatingly. “But . . . I cannot tell. Perhaps I am.”

The day had broken dully, and it was not until the afternoon that Lily could dispel her melancholy. Meantime her husband had failed to observe her increased dejection. He was engrossed with the

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view before him. The hazy mist was lifting in columns of intensest green from the shore, and the deep blue of the ocean, as it glimmered under the warming sun, filled him with a deep satisfaction. Again farewell to England! He was going back to the land of rest: where all his passions and desires would lie in a delicious swoon of contentment.

At Freetown they spent two happy days. Viewed in the light of his present knowledge of affairs West African, the English colony appeared to far better advantage than it had done on the occasion of his maiden voyage. He enjoyed the primitive difficulties of the hotel with infinite zest. "The one un-English aspect of the place," he said, with a laugh. "One would think that the Government, which can supply railways and a market, would find funds to build an hotel."

It was in the grey dawn that they sighted Grand Bassa. The rocks loomed in the distance, and Lily hung over the side until she saw the boats leave the shore. "There is one of our gigs, Frank—just behind the mail-boat. Don't you see it—painted white and red? And look! Mr. Wrigley is in the stern."

As the boat came nearer she waved her hand to him, and the agent answered with a cheery cry of good morning. Then he ostensibly urged the boys to greater effort, for they leaned back lustily on their oars, singing the while one of their quaint native songs. To Frank's ears the faint dialect sounded strangely sweet, and he listened eagerly to the words: "Massa Benson has come back, and he bring our little mammie to her home, to her home."

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"My dear Frank," said Mr. Wrigley, as he ascended the ladder, "I'm glad to see you back again. The change has brightened you up immensely. And how is Mrs. Benson? Why, you're looking as fresh as the morning."

Lily laughed, and they were soon in the midst of a conversation that covered a multitude of subjects. And how was the paper progressing? asked Frank. Sturdily. *Better Things* had met with a good reception, and already the people were speaking of it as a bold and original venture. Curiosity had been aroused, and the expenses of printing were being covered, with a fair margin for purposes of extension and improvement.

It had been in the late spring of 19— that Frank Benson came to Grand Bassa. It was now late November in the following year, and he was widely known in the country. The agent produced the last issue of their joint venture. As editress, Mrs. Wrigley had announced through its columns a series of lectures for the evenings of the African summer months, ending in April, 19—. The names were certainly convincing: Doctor A. P. Camphor, of Monrovia; Bishop Ferguson; Frank Benson, Esq.; Ralph Wrigley, Esq.; John Summerton, jun., Esq.; Mrs. Kenney Wrigley; and other distinguished people.

And the list of subjects was as diversified as modern: "The Negro at Home," "Fiction in History," "Business Life as a Moral Teacher," "Art in the Modern Drama," "The Immortality of Verse," "Ruskin as a Force." The change in Grand Bassa was pronounced indeed!

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Frank felt a new emotion of interest as the boat neared the shore. There was a large assembly of boys in the yard, and they enthusiastically hailed the return of Benson and his wife. When they had entered the house, and while Lily was busy with her experiences in the bedroom with Mrs. Wrigley and Maggie, he overhauled his boxes and arranged his books and papers in the old accustomed places. His agent had evidently taken some pains to render the room more suited to the requirements of the young people, and Frank looked round him in great pleasure.

During the next few days he found that the old place had been besieged with a vengeance. *Better Things* appeared with a regularity unusual to Liberian periodicals, and—in the interests of the paper!—Jack Summerton was a regular visitor to the house. It was noticeable that Maggie Wrigley and he sat together on these occasions, and that his column of local news received a great deal of attention at her hands.

One night Frank was sitting out on the piazza with his agent. The voices of the two girls could be heard talking merrily inside, and soon Lily appeared at the door. He raised his eyes, and smiled delightedly. She had attired herself in the old dress of white, with its scarlet sash and open throat. Her hair fell around her shoulders in ripples, and she looked at him out of eyes sparkling with fun. He took her hand gently in his.

“This is home again indeed, Lily,” he said.

She looked down, and played with the fringe of her sash.

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"It is too childish now, Frank," she said, with a laugh and a tear. "I am a staid married woman. This is the last time that I shall wear it."

The days passed happily just now. There was no need of special occupation at the factory, as the lull between the seasons was approaching. The young people wandered over the country, Frank and Lily in advance, and Maggie and Jack Summerton behind. There were many houses at which to call, innumerable people to greet after the honeymoon absence, scores of favourite spots to visit. Frank thought that he had never known such unalloyed happiness since his childhood.

Old Summerton spent a week-end at the Atlantic House early in December. He had called to remind Frank of the proposed visit into the interior. Clayton intended joining the party, and was to meet them at Baddy Town, fifteen miles along the Heldonville Road. There were to be only four in the expedition—Summerton, Benson, Clayton, and Prince Kammok.

When Frank heard the name of Kammok he was considerably surprised, and a little afraid.

"Kammok!" he said. "Is he not brother to the dead girl Samie, of Veytown?"

"Just so," replied Summerton. "He is an excellent shot, and he has always joined me in previous years."

"But, Clayton," urged Benson, "is there no danger of a rupture?"

"I hardly think so. The affair is almost forgotten now."

And Frank had perforce to be content. The expedition was to start on the 20th of December,

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and he determined to enjoy the few days left to him before his departure. From England he had just received a box of books and photographs. Lily was absent when these arrived. Since her challenge to him just before they sailed from Grand Bassa she had been strangely silent about literary matters. Beyond reading his stray articles and poems in *Better Things* she had not once referred to his work. He opened the case with a feeling of indifference, and lined his shelves. But Lily's examination of their room upon her return from Buchanan was one succession of little cries of delight and surprise. Hardy, Meredith, James, Seton-Merriman, Hope, Zangwill, Malet! "Oh, Frank, to think that you did not take me to see your publishers, nor one of your literary friends, while we were in London!" she cried. Then breathlessly, "You have here all the books that I shall ever want to read."

Soon she hovered between the little volumes of poetry, and took down the last book of verse from the pen of Edmund Gosse.

"I remember seeing an adverse review of this in the *Spectator*," she said.

"And I do not suppose that Gosse minded much," he said. Then he began to refer to a passage in one of his own little volumes: "I like to believe that my words are met with disapproval sometimes, and I should cease to write if everyone held my views. We shall not all think alike——"

"Until we all cease to think."

She finished the quotation with a glance of shy confession.

"You have read *Musings*?" he asked.

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"Yes, I read them over a year ago."

"But I had no copies here."

"You silly boy! Could I love you and not read what you had written? I ordered all your books from London."

To cover the amazement on his face she took up a photo of Richard le Gallienne. "The beau-ideal of a poet. Have you any of his books here?" He lifted *English Poems* down for her, and with quick perception she read one or two of the shorter pieces. "Fantastic, but keen in perception." Then she took down one of Katharine Tynan Hinkson's volumes, and read with great delight:—

*"All day long in exquisite air
The song clomb an invisible stair . . .
I saw no staircase winding, winding,
Into the glory sapphire and blinding,
But all day long. . . ."*

"Oh, Frank, what delicate imagery! I can just imagine what she must be like, a little fragile woman, all hair and eyes."

With a laugh he handed her a signed photograph. She looked at it for a moment, then uttered a sigh of dismay and disappointment.

"My dear Lily, at an early stage in an artistic or literary career one must learn to recognise the fact that appearance has little to do with production. Remember Swinburne, and sigh not to see the faces of the people whom you have learned to love through the medium of their books."

He talked with her banteringly as they passed from picture to picture. And after she had joined Mrs. Wrigley and Maggie on the piazza he took

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out the manuscript of his almost forgotten novel with a new-born interest. He must continue his task. Lily was indeed a muse worthy to be worshipped, and her inspiration of inestimable value. He placed the sheets before him and began to write. The last few sentences were peculiarly pleasing, and he found that all his former dilemmas had disappeared. He wrote easily and briskly, and more than a dozen sheets of closely written manuscript lay upon his desk when the first bell rang for dinner.

"You have been working, Frank?" asked the agent, as he passed the soup.

"A little," he replied deprecatingly.

"We have your copy in the formes for the next two issues of our paper. Is it a new story?"

"The old one," said Frank, with a laugh.

"I am so glad," exclaimed Lily. "I want to see you at work again. And this story is to make you famous, remember."

He missed her sorely after the meal. She evidently deemed his work of great importance, and after arranging his lamp and papers, left him alone. His eagerness for production had gone. Her voice came to him in happy snatches from the large room, and he listened with his pen idly clasped between his fingers.

CHAPTER XXIV

LITERARY GROWTH IN AN UNLITERARY MAN

“Inspect the environment of thy life, and expect to see surprising phenomena”

Contributed to “Better Things” by Ralph Wrigley

“**T**O England principally has fallen the task of civilising the dark races of the earth; and the work would have been an easier and more pleasing one if it were certain that the natives brought under the régime of our culture would remain civilised. But that they do not, regrettable as the statement may appear, is a long proven fact. We never know whether immediately the pressure of white influence is withdrawn there will not be a revulsion towards lower ideals, or even in some cases a return to savagery. In a thoughtful essay the late Grant Allen maintained that the tendency towards retrogression in the negro races was very strongly marked, and he inclined to the belief that under no circumstances could the black man be thoroughly and permanently grounded in white refinement. One can imagine what the withdrawal of English control would be in our West African colonies. The educated natives, now so highly polished, would sink back to their

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ancient level ; slowly maybe, but with none the less of sureness.

“India is a case in point. Such acute observers as Rudyard Kipling and Flora Annie Steel have often expressed their belief in the inherent strength of native customs, and it is to be doubted whether, if the English retreated, there would be left any trace of our dominion twenty or thirty years from now. The missionaries declare that they dare not remove their presence, and native pastors are wont to introduce Buddhist teachings into their sermons. The people themselves are keenly watching the phenomena of the passing years, and it is unswervingly believed that this alien rule is a mere passing cloud upon their horizon, permitted that Hindooism may ultimately shine with the more resplendent lustre.

“The negro is very imitative. So much indeed has this been demonstrated to the writer since his first visit to West Africa, half a lifetime ago, that he has often been inclined to mistrust the mental status of his black contemporaries. But so apparently consistent have been the works of many of the most gifted of the Liberians, whom he knows intimately, that he has finally been persuaded that this vast sense of conceit can be eliminated. The abnormal vanity of the superficially educated negro is a factor which sorely excites and irritates the judgment of the white man. Excesses in dress and jewellery, and a swaggering gait which is not innocent, because it is aggressive, are traits which spoil the best of characters.

“There can be no denial of the tendency of the native to go back to his ancient gods, to revert to

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savagery, after learning something of civilisation. When Grant Allen wrote his inimitable story of the Rev. John Crowdy, I was in touch with him, and supplied him with the outline of the narrative. It was heartily criticised and condemned as an absurd exaggeration. But return to barbarism of a negro after long association with the enlightenment of good society has been repeated scores of times.

“ Perhaps a story from my own experience will illustrate my suggestions. The thinness of surface civilisation is liberally shown amongst natives of the West Coast of Africa who are taken in hand for the purposes of education by white residents. Ten years ago I returned to England for a vacation, and carried with me from Grand Bassa a native boy of fourteen years of age. He was a handsome little fellow with bright eyes and an intelligent face. We sent him to school, and my wife bestowed much attention upon him. Among other acquirements he mastered the early rudiments of music, of which he was passionately fond, and learned to play with great feeling upon the organ. He quickly gained the knowledge of how to read and write. At table we sometimes indulge in French, and of this language he managed to learn sufficient to carry on an easy conversation. He appeared to be eagerly fond of verse, and although he could form only a very vague idea of the lines, he would pore over Longfellow and Shelley with most commendable earnestness. He proved to be an excellent playmate, became very popular with the other boys, and was not once proved guilty of treachery or dishonesty. His early amazement at the marvels of ‘white

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man's things' gave way to an easy nonchalance, and six months after his arrival in England he had adapted himself thoroughly to the conditions of his environment and rarely mentioned his home.

"After a residence in London and Manchester of just over a year I returned to the coast, and carried Benny with me. For a fortnight I remained in Sierra Leone among friends, and while there the black boy remained patiently by my side, and showed no impatience to reach Liberia. Then a party of negroes arrived who were bound for Monrovia, and I continued the voyage. In due course we reached Grand Bassa. A few miles away in the bush Benny's tribe lived, and for several weeks after our arrival he held no communication with them. Meanwhile he had settled down in the house as steward, and seemed quite happy.

"At last he asked for a holiday that he might visit his people. I willingly let him go. His kinsmen must have claimed some part in his prosperity, for he carried with him all the treasures acquired during his long stay in England. After an absence of six weeks he returned—empty.

"And here comes the strange part of the story. Although books were placed in his way, and he was offered all the advantages peculiar to his intimacy with myself and my wife, he gradually took on the looseness of country customs. Education to him would seem to have been a garment which he could throw away at will. Within three months of his return to Bassa Benny was thoroughly degenerate. He ended his career by robbing the safe and escaping into the bush.

"This is only one of many instances which

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I might cite from actual experience, and is an amazing and convincing instance of the strength of racial instincts. At times I have almost despaired.

“What are the causes of such reversions? Perhaps the strongest motive is the passion for change—that inherent restlessness which shows itself in the constant flow of natives from the interior to the coast towns. Another is the hatred of restraint—the instinct to throw off the burden of self-control and obedience to social conventions. Then there is the influence of native law, curiously opposed to white practices, and wide-reaching in its power. All these operations brought into one heavy focus derange the cultured life of the emancipated native, and thrust him back into barbarism and ignorance. The man who has not the careful training of centuries in endurance and resistance is hopelessly involved in the presence of old temptations.

“The object of all teaching is to produce a type, and this type is meant to be a copy of the teacher. The object of our training of the negro is to make manifest a higher culture among them, and this culture must be ours. But we must walk slowly. As our young friend Frank Benson remarked in his eloquent address a few weeks ago, it will need many generations to convert the native tribes of Liberia to either Christianity or civilisation. We must remember that they are born with strong inherited tendencies towards vice, and are ever under a system of fetish which is totally at variance with our religion and manners. It will need strenuous effort on our part to make of the descendants of

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barbarians and cannibals a race of Christians and gentlemen.

“And let us be just. Why should we expect an educated negro to be so much better than an instructed European? It needs years for the acorn to fructify into the spreading oak. We must be as patient as Nature is in her workings, for all growth is gradual. Remember, the fruitage atones for the long hours during which we watched impatiently the gradual budding of the leaves.”

CHAPTER XXV

ONE PASSES

“Oh, sweet and bitter in a breath!”

“WE laugh,” said Mr. Wrigley, “in the warm security of our drawing-room at the idea of a spirit world. But one’s ideas undergo a change after a few nights among the mysterious noises of the bush. The crocodiles send out their whining cry, ending in a hoarse groan or a snarling sniff. There is the cough of the leopard, and ever the sweeping rush of the bats and the flying foxes.”

They were talking of the proposed journey into the interior. The expedition was to start that morning. Prince Kammok had arrived with his boys on the previous afternoon. His equipment of guns was the admiration of the agent, who would have joined the party with avidity had the opportunity offered. The Vey man looked every inch the son of a king. He was fully six feet in height, and his shoulders and arms were those of a giant.

Fortunately Clayton met them at the appointed place, so there was no delay. After six days’ travelling they arrived at a place called Pahya, and a day later passed Tola, which Summerton had decided should be about the point of their destination.

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They hurried through the town, and halted in a clearing some fifteen miles further on. Here they built their tent, fixed up primitive seats, and prepared to make the place their home for an indefinite period.

The whole great country for miles around was without population and virginal to its Maker ; but as Frank stood on one of the mounds and watched the reddening sky, on the first night of the camp, no chilly sense of loneliness struck upon his soul. He drew instead a mighty breath of enjoyment. "If only this were an English colony ! Heavens ! Give to Britain but the vast interior of Liberia, and what could she not make of it—and her colonists ? Here is space—healthy, ample, lucrative."

The last glorious quiver of the sun faded from the bush, and the far hills took on a purple hue. Benson descended from his elevation and sought the camp. He found the fire well lit and his companions talking pleasantly as they squatted round the blaze. He had discovered from scraps of conversation with Kammok that he was a perfect after-dinner talker. He possessed the gift of those who live in the open air and are constantly on the move—the command of voice modulation, gesture, and an air of sincerity.

He was now relating how, while he was a student at Sierra Leone, he had acted as hammock-bearer for a few weeks. His experiences were amusing. Then suddenly he spoke of his return voyage to Bassa, and of a storm that had overtaken them midway, "like night before the dawn." His voice was weird, and his hands were outstretched blindly. "As black as the devil. And, before the

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blast came, as quiet as the grave. The water could be heard washing the sides of the ship like the murmuring of a crowd—and nothing more. This for two hours. Engines stopped.” His hands were spread in deprecation, and his voice rose. “Then came the tornado. I tell you, boys, that steamer rocked like a cradle, and the darkness did not lift an inch.” He paused comprehensively.

Frank saw that this was an invitation to question him. “And you came out all right?”

Kammok looked at the fire for some minutes; then he answered. “Man overboard! I was leaning over the rail, and saw him lurch from the upper deck. How the wind howled! A sudden splash, and then a gurgle or two. I saw his white face. The captain screamed out orders that were never obeyed, and the man struggled in the surf.”

“He was drowned?” The blood of all ran cold at the realistic voice in its mode of description.

“Yes. We reached Grand Bassa after three days.”

The native stooped over the fire. The shifting light showed up fitfully upon the faces of the little party of four. Clayton yawned. Summerton pulled out his watch. “Suppose we retire,” he suggested. Frank welcomed the interruption. Soon they were all wrapped in their blankets within the tent, and sleeping soundly.

So the days passed in waiting. Through the hours of light they hunted deer, or lounged in the clearing. Benson possessed more of the hunter's than the sportsman's desires. He did not care to kill for the mere sake of killing. The first

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instinct is the human and natural one—one that must assert itself, the need of searching for food. But this appetite is appeased when sufficiency is attained. The sportsman's wishes, however, are insatiable. He kills because of the joy realised in the act of killing. So Frank looked forward to the elephant hunt with some degree of aversion ; but meantime he killed deer and pigeons with a delight that he had never until now deemed possible to him.

Their camp was ten days old before a herd watered near them. Frank was startled from sleep by a crashing noise in the jungle near by. In the soundless midnight air the noise seemed tremendous. He roused his companions, and they lay acutely awake. It was too dark to attempt hunting. They waited for developments, starting occasionally as a shrill trumpeting penetrated to them. Shortly before daybreak the herd moved away, but they were startled at breakfast by an unwonted crash beyond the clearing.

An elephant fight was in progress, and the only course open to our friends was to await results. A combat between these huge beasts will last for days if the two be well matched. The beaten beast retreats temporarily, and is leisurely followed by the other, until by mutual consent they meet again.

The weaker elephant was now hiding in the bush near the camp, but Summerton's experience told him that the best policy would be to wait for the oppressor to approach, as he would be followed by a number of friends.

It was late in the afternoon of Friday that a shrill

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trumpeting and crashing of trees broke the silence. They knew that the fight had begun again. Before they could reach for their rifles and hurry from the tent the younger elephant, uttering deep roars of pain, charged across the clearing. In sheer fury he began to destroy the bush. From a deep stab in his side the blood was streaming. He had magnificent tusks, and the old trader's eyes gleamed as he looked at them. By this time the whole party had armed themselves and were grouped near the tent door. Suddenly there was a change in the animal's demeanour. He had scented them.

An angry elephant is afraid of neither man nor beast. The wounded animal backed into the open space and stood like a statue. The next moment he flung up his tail, waved his trunk restlessly, and bore down upon the tent with wonderful speed. His rage was manifest. Ten yards off he paused.

The arrangement was that Prince Kammok should have the honour of the first shot. Clayton was nearest to the beast, and Frank glanced impatiently over his shoulder at the native, mentally inquiring why he did not fire. There was a peculiar look of mingled hope and hate on his face. Frank was puzzled. The elephant would perhaps require three or four bullets before he could be safely despatched, and any moment he might charge.

Summerton moved unquietly. The Englishman was in danger, and Kammok's delay might result in his death. Then he gripped Frank's arm. The other elephant had appeared on the edge of the clearing, and was approaching Clayton from behind.

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It was the native's privilege to fire first, and to protect the one in front of him from any rear attack. The elephant was within a few yards of Clayton, and his danger was apparent. Still the black made no move.

Then both Summerton and Benson sprang to their feet and shouted. The rearward animal retreated. At twelve yards they shot both barrels into the wounded elephant. But even the four shots were ineffectual. The smoke obscured the air for a moment, and the elephant was upon them. His tusks gleamed through the smoke with terrible distinctness. They just had time to fall flat to save themselves from being gored. His ponderous feet did not injure them, although he passed within a few inches of their bodies. As he sped along he shrieked shrilly and crashed into the bush. The whole of the herd was in instant commotion. Our friends took up their stand against the tent, and an hour later were in possession of twelve good tusks.

Samie was not yet avenged. Kammok had failed.

Two evenings later Frank was returning from an excursion in the hills. He walked slowly along the narrow path, and reached the open piece of land, upon which their tent had been fixed, about sundown. Everything was quiet. Evidently Summerton was away stalking a deer for supper, and Kammok and Clayton were enjoying themselves somewhere in the bush. He built the fire, and then sat down to await the return of his companions. Soon Clayton and the native came over the brow of the hill, and Frank saw that they had been hunting. Both had rifles in the hollow of

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their left arms, and they looked tired and weary. But they had no game.

The fire was lit, and as they sat by its side Frank was instantly aware of a subtle fear. On Kammok's face was a restless look of wickedness, that he knew boded ill to someone. The features sometimes appeared the very incarnation of hate. Clayton chatted volubly. He seemed in high spirits, and all his conversation was reminiscent of the period when first he came to Liberia. Several times he mentioned laughingly the name of Samie, the Vey girl.

"Come and have a game of cards," said the native at length. Clayton readily accepted, and Frank remained outside the tent to watch for Summerton's return.

He was roused from a reverie by a sudden loud exclamation of fear from inside the tent. He sprang to his feet and confronted Kammok on the threshold. The two men stood looking into one another's eyes silently. The native had his rifle on his arm. Then Frank, as in a dream, heard himself cry, "Good God! man, put down the gun! What do you mean to do?"

The black's face hardened. "He robbed me of my sister. He murdered her. I have waited for this day for two years. Our tribe demand revenge."

Frank made a futile effort to possess the gun.

"Go to the fire again, and I'll promise to put away the rifle."

Benson retreated. Immediately Kammok reentered the tent, and through the door the Englishman saw something that haunted his dreams for

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weeks. At the little folding-table, strewn with playing-cards, sat Clayton. His hands were laid flat upon his knees, his face was palsied with fear, the jaw loose and trembling, and the eyeballs starting. Three feet away the native pointed the barrel of his rifle at the white man's head.

Then came a shot. Clayton's body fell sideways to the ground, and as Frank ran forward in horror the negro sped into the bush. Rage and dismay held the young man dumb as he examined his companion's heart. He was quite dead. Then Frank plunged between the trees in the direction taken by Kammok. But there was no path, and he had to return.

And now Summerton came back with a plump deer. The old trader was so unnerved and broken when he heard what had happened that he pronounced an immediate retreat to the beach to be inevitable. And Frank was nothing loth.

Next morning, after burying Clayton, the two men started. They were over a hundred miles from home, but the journey could be performed in four days. On the crest of the ridge they paused and looked back at the place where they had buried the Englishman. A little mound rose in the middle of the clearing. On it they had placed a few sticks—"A. C." High in the sky birds were careering gaily. The day was very bright. The travellers turned resolutely away, and started out sturdily for Buchanan. Samie's wrongs were obliterated.

CHAPTER XXVI

MISUNDERSTANDINGS

“The most prominent fool in the gospel narrative is a restless capitalist”

VERY quickly did the year draw to its close, and the early January suns flushed Liberia into a newer beauty of green and purple. Maggie Wrigley and Jack Summerton had been married over a month, and their little white house peeped out of the bush midway between Buchanan and the factory.

Frank lay ill through several weeks, and the usual course of his life became to him a fragment, a reminiscence. The helplessness of his position, the enforced inaction, removed him to a distance from all his old thoughts. For many days and nights he was delirious, and babbled of Clayton's death. Now he was a boy at school; now a youth eagerly learning the intricacies of the language of which he yearned to be a prophet; now a man, eager, impetuous, yet withal restrained. The repose that succeeded his wild combats with unseen powers, his constant cries against distressing sights and weird experiences, was very welcome. After the shock had passed, Frank occupied himself again with his pen, and his last volume of essays had met with a success that appeared all the greater

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by reason of his long absence from home. His publishers sent him all the cuttings from the reviews, and a new edition of his *Musings* had been called for. An enterprising firm of magazine proprietors—old club friends—asked him for a series of West African stories, and they offered him a price not to be despised.

Frank took his success quietly, but Lily was more than delighted. She felt that the essays owed their creation to Liberia, and when the title-page revealed the words "To Lily," she kissed her husband gratefully. Busy as he always was, Frank could not be accused of being prolific. He wrote with his accustomed attention to detail, and his quiet mode of living was such that it would have been pain to do less and joy to do more. There was a growing pain in the thought, notwithstanding, that Lily was gloating in secret over his earnings. A mercenary spirit he disliked intensely, and in one he loved it became unbearable. He was a man who would have lived in bare comfort, and died in luxury. Then he would reprove himself—Lily was just the kind of woman to guide and control his finances. And surely she was the least sordid of creatures. He was only afraid lest she should misrepresent herself to idle eyes.

"Lily, child, what does it matter whether I earn little or much? We have sufficient for our needs in Grand Bassa."

"Grand Bassa! It is always Grand Bassa!"

And she turned on to the piazzà with an impatient sigh.

January had ended, and the summer was very

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hot. But there came a day when the rain poured down in columns with only slight cessation. The sun had suddenly darkened, and from the north a cloud spread with astonishing rapidity, shrouding the sea in curling mists and filling the town with a pale, uncanny light. Everything seemed to be waiting. Overhead the cloud hung like a huge eagle, whose vast wings were fringed with crimson fire. Then had come a low growl, angry, insistent. The wind freshened, drifting from the sea in sweet-smelling gusts. Then, as if the heavens had opened their flood-gates suddenly, the rain and wind came down—a deluge, a tornado.

The young people sat on the piazza, covered from the rain, but open to the fury of the storm. It was splendid, invigorating, exulting. Its reckless fury, its untamed force, thrilled and stimulated. Everything was blotted out—the sea, the trees, the houses—behind a wall of water. The heavy drops pelted on the zinc roof in continued clamour, as if a million castanets were playing in concert. The thunder roared and echoed like the guns of a score of battleships with loud reverberation; the lightning zigzagged in long, blinding streaks; the wind wailed like a soul in torment, and the house shook under its force. It was wonderful. Long residence in Liberia had reconciled Frank to these huge torrents of water, and he loved to watch the grey and blue haze upon the sea, and the wide, vaporous mists that trembled on the bush. For a few moments the sun would break through the clouds, and the wet sands glistened splendidly in its rays, while the

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rain hung in diamond drops upon the trees. The next day was damp, dull, heavy. Lily again referred to the magazine stories.

“Do you intend to accept the offer?” she asked.

“I don’t think so. I had almost forgotten the matter, to tell you the truth. Perhaps I may, but there are far more interesting things to attend to.”

“And less lucrative. Think of the money, Frank. What is the good of throwing away good material? Look at *Better Things*. You give it of your best—for nothing! Why contribute to the Liberian press without any monetary recognition of your services, when you can always demand a good price for your matter in England?”

“My dear child, I have told you that to make money is not in the sphere of an author. He has heavier responsibilities. He owes a duty to the world—a duty wider than that owing to self, or those connected with self.”

She looked at him with a curious expression.

“What do you mean?” she asked.

“Not until the last page of a manuscript is written and the ink has dried upon his pen does a writer realise the wonder of his workmanship. What matters it if the populace suddenly run after a new name, and leave this latest work untouched? He will remember the long hours he has spent over his sentences, the weary grind of mental labour, the years of his life that have gone to build up this structure of paper and ink—‘words like unto tears’—and then he will be able to say, ‘Money or no money, popularity or no popularity, at least I know I have done my best, and told them the truth in the face of all convention.’”

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“But that is no argument in favour of work without payment,” she said.

He gave a gesture of irritation. “Won’t you understand that I cannot work under the rule of the magazine press? I shall never exaggerate detail and write sensational nonsense in order that my bank-book may show a large credit balance. To present the truth as I conceive it, through the best medium available, and then to remain content with the results—that is the author’s best and only real reward.”

The wind had veered round, and was now blustering about the house, shaking the windows angrily. The rain came down in gusts. “I want you to accept this commission,” she said, with renewed pertinacity.

“Aren’t we rich enough, Lil? I am sometimes quite alarmed when I hear of my royalties. What more can we need here, child? We have happiness, and—home.”

When Lily spoke again her voice was cold and hard. “You call Grand Bassa home! But why need we make it so? Surely we could be more comfortable elsewhere. . . . But see, the rain has ceased. Go away for a time, and come back with a more rational view of things.”

The clouds had driven seawards with a laugh of white and red, and the sky looked dazzlingly pure. Frank turned towards the wardrobe, and took down a cap.

As he passed through the yard he looked back. Lily’s eyes were filled with tears, and she smiled her parting rather woefully. She leaned over the piazza-rail. “We can never have the same opinion

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about your profession, Frank," she cried more brightly. Then she sat down and bent low over her book.

The air was exquisite, and the freshness of the morning filled him with a sense of relief. But his enjoyment was not sincere, he felt, and when he neared the native town he had made himself poignantly miserable. If Lily and he could disagree at this early stage about his work and the question of the location of their home, what great issues depended upon an immediate understanding! His feet slipped in a slushy mire, and he stepped hurriedly to one side as a Bassa cripple approached him. The man's footless leg was swathed in green leaves, and his face was half eaten away with a loathsome disease. Frank passed into the more open road. On either hand were the gigantic palms and elms, vast, motionless, swathed in mist. In the distance the hamlets looked grey and insipid, and it was eerie to listen in the solitude to the drip of the many waters that were trickling down to the beach. Here met three or four small rivulets; there, a slimy stream fell into a depression forming a miniature pond. The whole of the road was articulate. This was not Frank's first experience of the aftermath of a Liberian storm. He turned home again, and met his agent on the lower path, returning from one of the neighbouring factories.

Mr. Wrigley delighted in desultory conversations in the open air. He had often caught Frank on his way to and from the post office and other local places. For a time they talked of the improved prices of produce, and then the agent exclaimed—

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"I suppose it will be only a few months longer that I shall remain your host, Frank."

"Oh! Are you thinking of retiring? I have enjoyed your companionship so much that I am afraid your successor will meet with a poor reception from me."

Wrigley laughed heartily, and looked at his companion with humorous eyes.

"Retiring! Why, my dear fellow, what should an old man like me, with a daughter comfortably married and settled here, and a wife in the best of health, want with England?"

"Are you going to die then," Frank asked in the same tone of banter, but still in wonder.

"Not for many years, I hope."

"Then how am I to lose you as host?"

The elder man placed his hand affectionately on Benson's shoulder.

"I have been here twelve years now, Frank," he said, "and during the whole of that time I have never had a holiday. Times innumerable I have had attacks of fever, but God has been very good to me. Since Maggie has married into a negro family I have felt more and more convinced that Bassa should be my real home. Remember, lad, I have been on the West Coast of Africa for the greater part of my life, and the rush and worry of existence in England does not attract me. Of course, I might buy a little farm in some unfrequented country place in the northern counties: but I should miss always the black faces to which I have grown so thoroughly accustomed."

He paused and slackened his pace.

"Now with you," he continued, "it is entirely

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different. Both Lily and yourself are quite European in culture; and I have noticed lately an increasing restlessness in your wife's demeanour. You will not remain with me much longer, Frank. England is calling you. I only hope you won't forget us altogether when you are so far away. We have all grown fond of you, and there is a mail every fortnight remember."

Frank moved restlessly. It was palpable that his agent knew more of Lily's desires than he himself had been able to observe. A hot expostulation was in his mind, but he hesitated before speaking.

"There is no reason why we should change at present. I don't think that Lily's present restlessness can be permanent. She wants a holiday. Of course, my wife talks a great deal of England. Who can wonder when everything appeared so new, so wonderful, and so strange to her? But whatever fancy may possess her mind at present, I am sure that she would ardently long for Liberia after a few months' absence from the sea and flowers."

"That may be so. Were she of pure negro blood the case would be clear. It must be remembered, however, that she is almost as much of Aryan culture as she is of negro. Naturally she thinks a great deal of Europe."

They had entered the yard, and were now ascending the stairs. Lily and Mrs. Wrigley stood at the door of the dining-room. The girl's cheeks were flushed, and her eyes still looked dewy and bright with tears. She whispered softly to him as he passed, "Forgive me, Frank. I did not mean to vex you."

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After dinner he took out his writing materials and worked assiduously at his novel. Lily came into the room about eight o'clock and sat near him quietly. Presently she took down a volume of verse, and began to sing softly. He lifted his head in some eagerness.

"How rarely you sing to me now!"

"Put those sheets away, Frank," she said, snatching playfully at his pen and secreting his ink. "Did you marry me or literature?"

Frank looked at her with eyes that smiled.

"What a question! Literature, of course! I committed bigamy when I married you.

*'Think not the poet loves like common clay,
He wooes his art, and to his muse is wed;
Vain all thy words and all that thou canst say,
He takes no other amour to his bed.'*

Lily brought her chair nearer to his.

"Talk to me," she said.

He obeyed—the sweet nothings of love—and she listened to him quietly, occasionally replying in little exclamations and cries of delight. Soon a great silence fell upon them, and they took each other's hands.

"Frank," she said, after the lamp had been long extinguished, and they had drunk in the pleasure of each other's presence, "have I been very wicked since our return to Grand Bassa?"

The moon threw a long ray of whiteness across the bed, crowning her with a misty radiance. Frank's lips replied with his voice. "Wicked! No, indeed! Why do you ask?"

"I heard Mr. Wrigley's last words when you

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were returning this morning from your walk, and they have made me feel how very unhappy I have been this last few weeks."

"Why didn't you tell me? I have been so busy during the rains that I have failed to notice your depression, and there can be no doubt that the weather has been oppressive and trying. But you have certainly not been wicked, Lily. You could hardly be that, little one."

She did not answer for some minutes. Then a sigh came from her lips, and she said hurriedly—

"Frank, I *have* been very wicked. You are such an active mortal that the monotony of the place does not trouble you. But I have grown to loathe Grand Bassa since I saw London and Paris. When the sun shines and the birds sing, when the sea is bright and the flowers flash in the bush, I am happy for the time. But, on a day like this one has been, I am dreaming constantly of the Strand, of Hyde Park, of Fleet Street, and I long for England. Take me away, Frank, take me away."

Her face was turned towards his in appeal, and Frank looked at her in a pain too deep for words.

"My dear child!" he said.

"Why can't you understand? Surely you, who know the pleasures of town life, must realise what I mean. I am caged, Frank, and I must have liberty or break my wings. What is the use of a life spent here with no laughter or tears, no wonder, no news, no change? Mrs. Brown has just had an addition to her family—the seventh: stupendous event! Old Pete Davis has bought a new hound! Two of father's farms have been witched! Why, even the natives have a pleasure

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that we lack—their frequent plays in honour of the spirits. We have nothing: neither plays, nor dances, nor assemblies.”

“But surely, Lily, we need none of these. We have each other, and all that nature and health can offer. This is an Eden of Delight, where we can learn to see life as it was primarily.”

“An Eden! An Eden of Dullness! The place is fit for torpid souls and ignorant minds; but we have life and desire. We might just as well die off at once as remain here unknown and uncared for.”

She broke off with a sob, and Frank could not find words in which to answer her. Her hand still rested in his, and she continued after a pause—

“I don’t blame you, Frank. You are more than kind to me, and since I met you I have known the happiest hours in my life. But we are idling away the precious days of our youth. We are not living; we merely vegetate. What pleasure we might have in England! And how foolish it is to waste our chances of joy and delight!”

“Darling, until I learned to love you, I had not learned how to live. It is because Liberia has produced my Lily o’ the Fields that I cannot lightly leave its shores. Here, I am at peace; and why should we throw away the blessings that lie in our hands in exchange for the curse of strenuous labour and unrequited toil? I have had this matter over with you before. Let us be content with what we have.”

“I am content with what we have, but I cannot be satisfied with what we are, and where we are situated. I hate this drowsy place, the primitive

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houses, the inadequate supply of European food, the discomforts, the eternal bush, the incessant swish of the waves on the beach. I would give willingly my dearest treasures for the low murmur of the streets and the glamour of the lights of London."

The sadness of the moon was cruel. Frank smiled grimly.

"You do not know what you are saying. It is easy to understand why there is a note of discontent in every life. If you only knew, if you only knew!"

The actualities of life are too stern for sentiment. There is no pathos in real misery—only the sordid, weary pain. His words were hard and his voice was cold.

"Say no more. We shall never be agreed, as you said this forenoon," he continued. "You will discover your mistake some day."

"As you will," said Lily.

Soon her restless breathing proclaimed that sleep had ended the conversation for that night. But Frank lay acutely awake, and the moon had paled before he closed his eyes in rest.

CHAPTER XXVII

AN AVENUE OF ESCAPE

“Worry pulls down the organism, and will finally tear it to pieces. Nothing is to be gained by it, but everything is to be lost ”

IT would be difficult to say in what trifles of Lily's speech and manner, manifold, unremembered, lay the cause of Frank's decision. It had often been said of him that he took no thought for the morrow, and it was indeed a fact that his joys and his pains came to him as suddenly as they passed. Easter had come, and the beach lay in one dazzling expanse of golden brown, while the ocean basked like a tired monster as far as the eye could reach.

The novel was almost finished, but he hesitated before writing the closing chapters. Meantime he wrote and re-wrote the earlier parts, correcting and reviewing with scrupulous regard. In labour lay the antidote of his pain. For the present appeared heavy and sombre. Lily's impetuous repentance and desire that he should forget their quarrel made her discontent all the more marked. Unless he were to yield up his hobby and return with her to England, he knew that only misery loomed ahead.

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The week-ends she began to spend at the house of the Summertons. Her father had now made his nephew's house his home, and Lily was very welcome when she called. Frank never doubted her love, despite these caprices, but he could not help the thought that she had married him primarily because he came from England, the land of her dreams. Upon the point of the commission for West African articles they were now both silent, and it was in secret that he commenced his task. The feeling of nauseating self-condemnation was acutely real. For Lily's sake he had broken down his altars and become a slave to the mediocre.

It was the middle of April, and the days were splendid ones. The sea sang sonorously on the beach, and clouds of pea-green and rose flitted across the sky. Frank carried his wife's chair to the end of the piazza and swung himself into his hammock. She had obeyed his summons with a dreary smile, and fingered the leaves of her novel while he spoke. He talked gently of his work, and then of his parents and his recent letters from home.

"But come with me for a walk. See, there is no danger of rain, and the sun is cooling now."

She looked at him uncertainly. "It is far too hot for pleasure, and besides, I am tired of the views. I know them all too well."

Frank dropped from his eminence with alacrity. "You must come. Take me to Jack Summerton's. It is some weeks since I saw your father and cousins."

Lily put on her hat, and they walked slowly in

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the direction of Buchanan by way of the beach. The firm, hard sand made an admirable path, and to the right the bush loomed wondrously green. Soon they reached a little heap of rocks, round which the sea eddied in miniature mountains of foam and spray.

“The perpetual sea!” Lily exclaimed.

Frank lifted her into his arms and carried her over. He did not answer, realising full well that he could give no satisfactory retort.

“If only we had been made of different mettle, Frank,” she continued, as they turned into the avenue of trees just beyond. “What should it matter to us whether we are in Liberia, England, or Timbuctoo? We have each other, and that should suffice. But it doesn’t. Here we are, wealthy, as the world counts wealth, and yet poorer, because of our environment, than that kruboy yonder girt with his only garment. Why have money if it is not to be spent? Since we last talked about this subject the world has deadened, and I have grown to think there is nothing sentient in it. And all because I am discontented, pining for the cities; and because the white people at the factory, including yourself, are well pleased with the place I have grown to despise.”

“If only you would work with me, Lily! It is labour alone that makes life endurable, believe me. Let me purchase a typewriter for you, and I will teach you how to become my amanuensis. And now let me make an acknowledgment. I have formally accepted Harmley’s offer, and the series of fetish articles will begin next June.”

“I am glad. You have been too fastidious in

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the past. What matters it from whence the money comes? Surely a cheque from *Harmley's Magazine* is as good as a draft from the *Looker On* or the *Thinker*."

He laughed a little.

*"From Helicon's stream a draught would once inspire
The bard to sing in sweet ecstatic flight;
But poets of this sordid age require
A draft on Parr's made payable at sight."*

"Oh, cease quoting your epigrams," she cried. But her eyes were brighter and her clasp more strong as they reached the lane which led to her cousin's house. She talked merrily. They still walked hand in hand, and she ventured a number of suggestions regarding the acquirement of new information for the series. At the door she paused with a gasp. The blinds were all drawn, and Maggie met them with a white face.

"He died suddenly half an hour ago," she said. "I have sent a boy for you. I suppose you came by the beach, and thus missed him."

The old trader had kept up his farms to the last, personally superintending their operation. But of late he had grown very feeble, and his young relations had persuaded him to rest on alternate days of the week. He would sleep badly, and insisted upon being the first to rise each morning. On many occasions he had prepared and taken breakfast upstairs to his nephew's bedroom, and sometimes Jack and his wife would hear him up in the night mixing a glass of his favourite toddy.

To-day he had slept until late in the forenoon, and Maggie had left him in bed while she went

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to one of the local stores for provisions. Jack Summerton was on the beach watching the despatch of a shipment of piassava, and on his return he found that his uncle had risen. The table was spread for the midday meal, and the old man was sitting at the window quite dead, a cup of tea in his hand.

Of books Joseph Summerton had known very little. He had only received a rough education, this grand old negro, but he was a cultured and refined gentleman. His had been the polish that comes from a bond of sympathy between nature and the soul.

Lily was very quiet in her grief. Her father's death was not such a loss as might have been conceived. He was the last link that had bound her to Liberia. She felt a curious sense of liberty. Still, she bent over his form in sincere sorrow, and was much subdued as they walked back to the Atlantic House.

The following morning was a grey one, and the little procession to the churchyard where Mrs. Summerton already lay proved reverent and calm.

Frank was thoughtful during these days. To leave Lily for a time! This was the decision at which he had arrived. In their suddenness the recent events had averted his plans, but he remained obsessed with the idea that in his absence alone lay the solution to the problem of his wife's happiness. She would then be freed from suggestions of change, and her old peace of mind would return. He tried hard to continue his articles for the London publishers, and Lily helped him from the storehouse of her infantile memories. *Better Things*

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still appeared at regular intervals, and his name covered a page of fluent matter in almost every issue. But his progress with the studies in fetish was slow. There was no real argument in favour of his distaste. For the Liberian magazines he had produced many able pieces of work, and his present task was clear and obvious enough. Yet he lingered painfully over the manuscript, and at last he deemed it possible that his power of production had left him. The simplest phrase when written looked clumsy and crude. The more he laboured, the more he became perplexed, and the desperation of the artist fell upon him. Finally he threw aside his pen in disgust.

“What progress, Frank?” asked his agent, as they sat at breakfast next morning.

Benson gave an impatient gesture. “I have my apology written for the next mail, and am determined to try no more. It has taken me a month to write two thousand words, and they do not please me now. If I were honest to myself I would burn them without compunction.”

“But what is the reason?” asked Mrs. Wrigley. “Your articles for us are excellently well written.”

“The reason? There is none. I cannot write—that is all.”

“Mail Harmley’s for a concession of time. It would be foolish to throw up the work altogether,” said Lily persuasively. “In a few days all will be well again.”

“Maybe. But I want the thing off my mind. I have worried enough.”

“Why won’t you be convinced, Frank?” asked the agent. “Grand Bassa is not the place for you

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young people. Go to England for a change, and come back to thank me in two or three years."

Frank started. Then he laughed a little. "Your prescription is still change, then?"

"Yes: hurry, noise, excitement. You are only dreary here, and the application of a thoroughly awake intelligence is needed for your fetish articles. Idyllic treatment would spoil them. Go home, and lose yourself in a crowd; watch the incessant course of traffic; indulge in movement. Let your personality be lost for a time in the strong tide of life."

Frank's eyes were gleaming. He did not speak.

"You *want* to be content here, but you are only bemusing yourself. There is young life in you, Frank, and soon you will be compelled to go from us."

Benson's lips were twitching nervously, and the truth of the words was strangely sweet to him. His long experiment had broken at last; but the time had been pleasant. It had taken him nearly two years to discover the truth, but now he knew that this had only been an interlude, that he must again live in the towns, or life would be no longer endurable.

He rose from the table and entered his room. The forsaken manuscript lay in a drawer. He looked at it curiously. "There are two mighty forces at work in Liberia to remove native fetish. On the one hand we have the American negro immigrants, who are Christians, and on the other Mohammedan priests, who travel down from the north of Africa. These followers of Islam have almost entirely subjugated the tribes of the interior.

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When we deliberate upon the superficiality of the native African mind, and . . .”

The words were ringing in his mind like a burden. He would try again, but this time the attempt should be made in London. From the drawer he lifted a letter addressed to “Charles Harmley, Esq., The Temple, London, E.C.,” and tore it into fragments. Then he took up his pen and wrote :—

“MY DEAR HARMLEY,

“Finding that the accumulated notes of the last few years cover a field too wide for the brief treatment required in six monthly articles of four thousand words each, I intend to travel to England by the coast steamer immediately following this. My main object is that we may negotiate for a volume after serial publication. You may expect me about a fortnight after the receipt of this letter, and you will please prepare a room for me on Halliday’s floor. No doubt we can work together for a few weeks, and your personal supervision of the articles will be helpful. I mean to give you good copy. Regards.

“BENSON.”

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE QUARREL

“The chief secret of comfort lies in not suffering trifles to vex, and in prudently cultivating our undergrowth of small pleasures”

COMMONLY it has been observed that local influences and peculiarities, albeit they loom so largely and prominently before the gaze of the resident, seem to appeal with an increased interest for a time if any new feature is discerned. Frank's marriage with Lily had caused comment. His gradual estrangement, observed, criticised, gave rise to innumerable knowing smiles and nods. Apart from the petty news, quarrels, bickerings, actions for slander in the monthly courts, and all the trivialities of gossip, the semi-educated townspeople have little which is calculated to add zest to their enjoyment of life. Had one little word of understanding been uttered by either Lily or Frank at this time, their lives would have been happy and unclouded by the sombre vapours of mistrust. But both were blind to each other's aspirations, and neither doubted that the next few months would gradually mould their destinies. However, the day that you lose the wonted sense of intimacy with your surroundings, that same day do you cease to be a member of your old com-

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munity. Henceforth you are a stranger, and your moral character has received a shock. This had already happened to Benson. The revulsion was sudden, but it was none the less sure. He did not mention his project to Lily, and daily his impatience grew to escape from the oppressive atmosphere of Grand Bassa. Lily spoke nothing of England. The days were bright and long, and she had made her own little garden down at the gate. The natives were childishly delighted, and as they strewed the yard with the strands of fibre they would pause to smile upon "little Missie Benson."

The thought that he must confess his intentions to Lily oppressed the journalist continually. It was only a week now before the steamer would arrive. At last came a day when his wife's own words brought on the disclosure. She was pruning her roses, and as he passed from the house to the kernel shed she called to him.

"Let me give you a buttonhole," she said.

"Thank you." And he vaulted lightly over the fence. "All in a garden fair, eh?" Lily looked at him keenly as she fastened the flower in its place.

"How quiet and reserved you have been lately, Frank! Are you unwell? And you don't seem to be doing any literary work."

"No—I am dead tired of writing for the time being."

"Then won't you let me help you again? It is over three weeks since you asked me to act as amanuensis."

"The ordinary labours of the factory seem to please me better at present."

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She pouted, and her face was very sober.

“Do you know sufficient to carry you through your commission? I thought your appetite for information was insatiable.”

“Is not two years' study enough? I know as much about the fetish as I shall ever want to work up.”

“That cannot be much, judging by your present aversion from labour,” she retorted, with a laugh.

“How tantalising you are, Lily! Not in this matter alone, but in others. You are always telling me that I ought to go home, and yet you now indirectly suggest that another two or three years in Liberia are necessary for my success.”

Her eyes were full of distress.

“Mr. Wrigley is talking to Jack Summerton yonder. Go and join them.”

She opened the gate for him, and murmured, “But why worry so much over the work, Frank?”

He looked at her with an expression of wonder.

“Am I not undertaking the commission solely for your benefit? Was it not you who, by petulance and discontent, persuaded me against my better sense to perform the work? Not that it troubles me, though, now! It is the failure of my intentions that galls. Grand Bassa was to be my home for many, many months—perhaps years to come. You have killed its charm for me—prematurely driven me back to slavery.”

“You cannot mean what you are saying,” she cried.

“I do mean it. What you told me the other day, and later confirmed by Mr. Wrigley, is true.

The Quarrel

I was a fool for coming to Liberia. Now I have my folly to regret with a great remorse."

"You wrong me, Frank, in saying that I am to blame. And you compel me to say things that should be left unsaid. On many occasions you have told me that your visit to this place was the result of a caprice, and I still maintain that it is good for you that Liberia has relinquished her beauty,—a fantasy, an ideal of your brain alone. You should certainly return to the life that is your natural sphere."

"I will. The next steamer shall carry me to England. I am sick of the life which has been mine for the last few months. You told me when first I met you that my stay would be brief. And you have been admirably consistent. The same words have been sounded in my ears unceasingly. Now I shall act upon them."

"You will not go alone. Perhaps that thought embodies the pain."

Her eyes were flashing. He looked at her calmly. There was a breathless pause. Two of the yard-boys noisily asked for the rose which had fallen from Frank's breast, and now lay at his feet. He gave it to one of them mechanically.

"Frank," the wife cried passionately, as the blacks moved away, "I am tired of being treated like a child. You do with me as you will. One day I am everything to you, and we enjoy a delicious leisure. Another day you throw me aside and hardly greet me. You cannot love me as I love you. I seem to be a kind of plaything to you. Sometimes your coldness so chills me that the whole world seems dead. But when you

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take me in your arms I forget all the anguish and the pain. I am bound to you for ever, and I cannot live without you : all my actions, my words, nay, my thoughts even, seem to belong to you."

Frank touched her hand in some compunction. His intention remained unshaken, despite the pity that momentarily moved him. She shook his hand off angrily.

"You cannot go with me, Lily. That is impossible. I am travelling to London purely on the business of the work undertaken for your sake. The convenience and comfort essential to your welfare could not be offered. If you went you might be happy for a time. The theatres and music-halls would amuse and the streets instruct. The noise would interest and the lights distract. But could it last? In England—I have said this before many times—I am a poor man among poor men. Are you able to drudge that my home and hearth may be bright?"

Lily's face drooped over the flowers. The words were bitter, harsh, unfeeling.

"Frank, you are hurting me. Let me say what I have to say now, and it will all be over. When first you came to Grand Bassa and visited our house I could get on without you. There was dear mother and father, the holidays with Cousin Jack, my books. But you have widened my life. Even if we continue unhappy, take me with you."

"It would kill you, child, if I did. After all, the trouble doesn't move around me and my decision to return. It is a question of environment. I can afford to keep you in comfort here. This is your home, and here you should remain.

The Quarrel

I can return to my old ways, and be satisfied with my limited means. You have shown me that life is impossible here for the two of us. And I am the one to make a move."

There was another painful silence. Then she burst out passionately—

"Why did I ever meet you? Before you came I had vague longings for Europe, it is true; but they would never have been importunate if I had not married you. I had a happy home, and Jack Summerton was practically——"

"The home has gone from you, Lily; and Summerton seems well content with his wife."

His face was towards the sea. But he heard the great catch in her voice as she broke down a shoot of the rose bush. He attempted to recollect the exact words of the sentence just uttered, and stood in dumb contrition at the gate. Then he passed silently through the yard and into the house.

The agent was perusing his mails from home, and handed him a packet with a smile.

"You have always a multitude of epistles," he said; "there is a cable among them."

Frank brought out a chair, and tore open the envelopes slowly. There were several letters from literary friends, terse, brief, eloquent, and one from his father: "You are doing too much, Frank. What are you living on out yonder? Nothing apparently. Last week we had three cheques transferred to us for your account, and to-day the midday post brings a fourth. Surely Lily needs a couple of new dresses? . . . But after all, lad, we hardly know the day that you may be coming home for good, and I know that expenses

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will then be very heavy. Only do not overwork yourself."

He tore off the wrapper of the cable in some surprise: "Benson, Grand Bassa. Letter received. Accept offer. Come immediately.—Harmley."

He held it out to Wrigley. "I shall go on Tuesday. Perhaps the boys had better commence to pack my boxes now."

As he passed quickly into his room he became vaguely aware that his agent was looking after him with a strange expression of amaze.

The cable was a matter of some surprise, and occasioned several conversations over meals. Mrs. Wrigley's ready acceptance of the position was embarrassing in a degree. But there were many considerations which she alone grasped. Lily's hour was at hand, and her matronly heart was full of love for the young wife. Again she longed for a constant female companion; and Lily's absence was a thing not to be desired.

"It will only be a few months' absence, of course," she said optimistically. "When the articles are completed he will return for Lily, and they will live in Manchester."

But Frank preserved a cool demeanour, and talked little of his ultimate intentions.

That night he stood at the bedroom window. The French shutters were thrown back, and a night-jar was singing somewhere near. The waves boomed out an undertone of harmony, and a faint breeze rippled by. Lily was stirring at the dressing-table. Her hair hung around her shoulders in long ripples, and she smiled bravely at his reflection in the glass as he turned his head. Mrs.

The Quarrel

Wrigley's view of the situation had pleased her ; and that lady had whispered certain significant words about a little life that had moved her greatly. She now showed her affection towards Frank in many little ways. For had she not misjudged him, and was he not to leave her soon ? Was not—crowning glory of all—the absence undertaken to render her happiness assured ? The conversation in the garden she endeavoured bravely to forget.

“Lily,” he said, “come and listen with me.”

As she leaned against him in the quietude of the night he felt suddenly that he could wish her dead. He loved her with such a fervour of feeling that the thought of his desertion filled him with anguish. And he knew—or deemed he knew—that her love would slowly change to hate were he to take her to a life of sordidness and grind. This was his wildest mistake. For at Eldon Green his income would have been more than sufficient for their needs. But his sense of monetary proportion was lost. He had lived so very cheaply in Liberia that in comparison the responsibility of an English household seemed a thing incredible.

She was in a nightdress of white fringed with pale blue, and loose at the neck and arms. As she bent over the sill and inhaled the pure air, he could see her breasts gleaming whitely in the gloom. “Frank,” she said softly, “you will be only with me a few days longer. Write me a poem to-night and leave it with me. I can kiss it when you are far away from the scenes that we once were wont to love.”

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“Presently,” he said, as he stooped to caress her. “You shall have it before I sleep.”

“I have been perverse with you, Frank, and I am very sorry.” She paused shyly, and he turned hurriedly to the table.

“The poem,” he said gaily. “Don’t light the lamp; I shall be able to see in the moonlight.”

“Frank, there is one thing: I should have liked you to be with me another month or so. Maggie remarked to-day that she thought you should have been proud to remain at home until after you knew. It is the first unloyal thing she has said of you.”

He did not understand.

“Until after I knew?”

She stopped his mouth with a kiss, and placed the pen in his hand. “Oh, you stupid boy!” she cried. “Write.”

And this is the poem he left with her to think of in the dimness of the future, because they had both delighted to listen to the song of the night-jar’s love—

*“Here ’mid the dewy stillnesses of night,
Unbroken save by rustling of the leaves,
When, riding high, the moon pours forth her light
In mystic radiance round the old-world eaves,
A sudden rush of melody and love,
A frenzied rapture from a brown bird’s throat,
Breaks on the ear, now thrilling high above,
Now down as though the earth were with its sudden glory smote.*

*“Oh, angel-voice destroying all the dark,
Oh, russet bird that haunts the dim-lit wood,
Leave thou the day to the upsoaring lark,
But stay with us and be our dreaming food.*

The Quarrel

*For whether this be ecstasy or pain
That opes my soul, or sin, or large desire,
I cannot tell; but while thy silver rain
Falls on my ear I feel my soul throb like an angel-lyre."*

He woke in the night to the sound of sobbing. Lily was lying on his breast in tears. Then it was that he understood what she had meant, and he muttered, "Better so." A great wave of tenderness ran over him. He put his arms around the wife that was so soon to be a mother, and soothed her as he would have done a tired child.

"Oh, Frank, our little one, our little one!" she said repeatedly. Presently she grew calmer, and only a few sobs came intermittently from her direction.

When she rose next morning she looked so unwontedly fresh and happy that he was partly convinced the whole course of events had been a dream. But the poem lay on the table, and Lily put it carefully away. "I shall always have you with me, and it shall be a token between us and our wonder-babe."

CHAPTER XXIX

IN EXITU ISRAEL

“Ascertain clearly what is wrong with you, and as far as you know any means of mending it, take those means, and have done”

THE steamer arrived in the Bassa harbour two days later. At an early hour the boat was ready to take off his boxes. Lily smiled and chatted always. She seemed to have forgotten her distress, and he recognised that she was pleased at the thought of his holiday.

He kissed her tenderly on the beach, and took his place in the boat. Even when the shore had receded into a long line of green, and the houses had dwindled into Lilliputian size, he could still discern through his glasses a fluttering of handkerchiefs near the factory.

The captain was an acquaintance of over a year's standing, and frequent calls at the Atlantic House had rendered him familiar with Frank's home-life. He talked glibly of many things. But Frank was hardly in the mood for conversation, and only replied in monosyllables. He leaned back in his deck-chair watching the sunset. The shore had now disappeared, and soon he retired to his cabin.

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His heart was aching. Was he any better than the dead man whose actions he had condemned a year before? Clayton had deserted Samie without marriage. He was leaving a tender creature of infinite possibilities to humour his sense of epicureanism, and this girl was tied to him by all the holiest bonds of love.

What a fool he had been to leave England! African life had charmed him by its simplicity, but it had brought him a dual punishment. Had the pain fallen on himself alone he could have borne it stoically. But there was Lily—"Lily o' the Fields"—and he could see her going through life with the burden of her marriage upon her to the end. "I should not have married her," he thought sadly.

They neared Sierra Leone in the early morning of a Thursday, in April, 19—. He paced the deck feverishly, and spent the two days during which the steamer discharged and received her cargo ashore at the old hotel. Memories thronged thickly around him. He dined at the open window. The place was empty of visitors, and he was quite alone. The night was pleasantly warm and the frogs had ceased their mournful croaking. Only the low hum of the insects and the far-away voices of stray passengers in the wider streets broke the silence. The lights of the steamer could be seen far out at sea, and the moon-rays fell in tremulous ripples on the water. On the hills loomed the barracks, and a bugle sounded shrilly down the slope. Not yet a year since last he had stayed at this place, but what long stretches of happiness and misery, pleasure and

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pain, lay behind! He whispered a stanza from his ancient poem—

*“I feel a tenderness at heart,
That was but gentle heretofore,
That once was lonely and apart,
But now is perfect evermore
Because—I love you!”*

Perfect! He dwelt on the word with ironical bitterness. Let him bury his failure. Had he not met with Lily Summerton his peace of mind might have remained undisturbed. He had loved her from the first, and from that love had grown all the complications of his marriage. When he left England he had believed himself to be safe from attack. He had looked with eyes of respectful indifference upon England's fairest roses. And he had fallen beneath the glance of the first pretty girl he had met in Liberia. No, he could never return to Grand Bassa. Lily represented a huge mistake, the reproach of his life. He must write to her immediately.

He called for writing materials, and sat long with his eyes fixed on the sea. The waves sang the words, “Perfect evermore, perfect evermore,” in his ears until he detested his position, his life, with an awful loathing. The irony of existence—the harshness of the gods! He took up the pen and wrote:—

“MY DEAR LILY,

“Between you and me a lengthy explanation should be unnecessary. We have both been deluded into a dream of false happiness. My

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experiment has failed. I only asked when I left England in 19— that the slavery of enforced labour should be lifted from my brain, and that I should be permitted to live a simple life. But the fates were unkind to me. They denied me my wish; they taught me to love you. And in your restlessness after our honeymoon I heard the town calling, calling. You have tried to believe that you could be happy with me in England. But I know otherwise. You were born with the freshness of nature in your veins, and you would pine away under the régime of a poor man's household. Affluence in Liberia is penury in England. Some day I may return to you. Meantime, be happy. I shall make arrangements in London for you to receive at least £100 per annum—sufficient to keep you in comfort. My love for you is unchanged. I kiss you in parting.

“FRANK.”

He did not post his letter in Freetown. His motive in writing it at this early stage was to avert repentance. When the steamer arrived in Liverpool he carried it straight to a pillar-box on the landing-stage, and then disposed of his luggage with an easier mind.

It was only on the second morning that he began to meditate seriously about the future. He had wired to London announcing his arrival, and as the train whirled him away to the metropolis his thoughts were conflicting ones. It had been cowardly, he felt, not to call at Manchester, but he had written to his parents telling them of his sudden return, and giving as the reason the

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new series of articles for *Harmley's Magazine*. "Lily is not with me," he wrote. "This is purely a business visit, and she was in good health when I left. Shall see you as soon as I can spare time for a trip north."

The duplicity and meanness of his actions did not show themselves to him at first. He believed firmly that he had taken the only course open to him, and he fondly hoped that his wife would be the first to recognise the wisdom of his steps. At the terminus he met Harmley, and they greeted each other heartily. "We thought we had lost you altogether, old boy. It is just like welcoming you back to civilisation after two years of barbarism."

They drove in a hansom to the Temple, and as they came from the quieter streets and passed into the open thoroughfares he felt the noise and movement to be very pleasing. The old familiar roar enveloped him in a cloud of reminiscence. He recalled smilingly the morning when he had driven through Manchester bidding farewell to all these manifold clamours. Now he was greeting them as friends well met.

But that night, amid a dull, heavy London fog, he thought of Grand Bassa. He could not sleep, and he lay miserably through the long dark hours. When the morning came the meagre sunlight seemed menacing and admonitory. He dressed carelessly, for his old pride in appearance was dead. He saw a young friend in the chambers about his income, and made over to his wife the amount named in his letter for a period of five years. The lawyer was flippant, and asked several embarrassing

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questions. Everyone had heard of Benson's strange marriage. Frank felt ashamed. Was he not laying a reproach at the door of one of the purest girls in the world? Would his unborn child ever know the care of a father? Could he dare take away such a right? Surely, surely he had been hasty. His duty lay in the regard of his wife and child, despite private feelings of regret. To go back to her, to ask her pardon, to beg her to share his labour, and to make the most of what God had granted them—this was a great and glorious vision!

“I have finished the deed, Benson.”

He started. The voice dispelled his dream. Then he signed the papers hurriedly, and left the room with a face as pale as death.

After his manuscripts had been laid aside for the night he walked slowly towards his hotel. He had declined his publisher's offer of rooms at his little villa in St. John's Wood, but he was to meet a party of his quondam friends at the Balliol Club after dinner.

He was cynically amused when he arrived to see that several of his fellow-journalists carried copies of the recent issues of the society papers. He detested self-advertisement, and he knew instinctively that they were the periodicals to which the young men contributed.

“Have you read my article upon the new Pinero play? I speak pretty strongly upon the bedroom scene. It is mainly written after the Archer style, and should excite some interest.”

Frank smiled coldly. He recognised the man as an acquaintance of two years before, but he now

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affected peculiarities of dress which rendered the acknowledgment a difficult one.

“Do you often copy Archer? Is he the best model? Why not give Chambers or Henley or Symons a chance the next time you review for the *Draught*?”

But the sarcasm passed unnoticed.

Soon the conversation became general, and worked into the ordinary ways—circulation, royalties, commissions, advertisement. Frank's soul sickened. Was this literature or the atmosphere of literature?—the god at whose shrine he had laid his life, his brain, his soul. Surely he had been right in declaring that the true home of the writer is the country, after all. He left early, in sore doubt and with warring emotions. The night air was very grateful.

The sun was high in the heavens before he reached the Temple next morning. Barristers' clerks hurried briskly through the courts and old archways. Anon a figure in wig and gown showed itself on the corridors, and then disappeared down the wide steps. The birds were twittering gaily in the elms, and the windows were rosy with the dappled light and shadow of the sun and the trees.

Frank's heart was moved. It was the first moment of peace that he had known since he left Grand Bassa. He stood in the courtyard, thrilling with the quietness of the place, the colour, and the grandeur. Sometimes the pigeons cooed, and the horses snorted at their stands. A line of policemen passed slowly by on their way to duty. A newsboy cried almost musically the morning papers.

There was a goodly pile of letters on his desk,

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and a scribbled note from his publisher : "Take a few days' holiday if you feel so inclined. The first two articles are grand. I am just off to Glasgow for a fortnight to arrange about our new branch newspaper there. Don't hurry the work.—Harmley." Another letter was from Eldon Green, expressing a degree of surprise at his sudden return and hoping that he would soon visit Manchester. He lifted the next in some perturbation. The envelope was dainty, coloured, and scented. Obviously it was from a lady, and he did not wish to renew old acquaintances except where he was really compelled to do so. He turned to the signature : "Kathleen Robinson." It ran :—

"MY DEAR FRANK BENSON,

"Until I saw the new issue of *Harmley's Magazine* I had thought it possible that you were no longer in the land of the living. Don't you remember that you have several times promised to spend one of your summer vacations with me? That was two years ago, of course, and then you were a charming boy with long hair. Now you are much changed, I suppose, and amid the gaieties of London life will have forgotten poor Kitty Robinson. How long have you been in England? Your present address is unknown to me, but when I heard last week from a friend that you were to be seen at the Temple I determined to write to that delectable spot. After your ridiculous solitude in—what's the name of the place?—Liberia (it might as well be Siberia), you must feel like a released prisoner.

"The weather is delicious in Swansea at present.

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You can indulge your fondness for the sea to your heart's content. Come and see me, and I'll take you the rounds.

"What was the special attraction over there? Is it really true that you married a negress, or was it only an affair of the heart? If she is in England do bring her with you. You know how democratic I am. If she needs a chaperon leave her with me. I contemplate a tour, and if we agreed nothing could be better for her development.

"Now do come, or I shall think you have entirely grown tired of me. "KATHLEEN ROBINSON."

A man with more experience of the shallowness of life would have read between the lines of this letter and better understood its purport. For Mrs. Robinson was a renowned flirt. But Frank Benson's life had been pure, and his thirty years had given him nothing of vice that his twenty years did not possess. He saw only in this note a chance of sympathy. Mrs. Robinson posed as a patron of the arts. She was a widow in comfortable circumstances, and her favourite occupation was to pass the days in the company of handsome young men. She had published two volumes of mediocre poems, and delighted to surround herself with literary notabilities. Frank had met her twice. The first time was at a social gathering of authors in London, where he had known only some half-dozen northern pressmen. She had looked with approval on his tall figure and long brown hair. At dinner she sat next to him, and afterwards carried him into the conservatory, where he talked little nothings about art and sentiment for an

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hour. The next time was at her house in Swansea, where many great men and women had assembled.

To Frank Benson Mrs. Robinson was only a motherly woman, and he would have repudiated any suggestion of sinister motives behind her invitation. He would talk to her, and in reply he would receive cooing words of sympathy and interest. When he thought of her he saw a woman approaching forty, inclined to stoutness, her face slightly treated with cosmetics. And then in contrast he remembered Lily—slight, girlish, young.

He filled his portmanteau. "She will perhaps understand," he thought. "And, in any case, the sight of the sea will be refreshing."

CHAPTER XXX

THE BUBBLE BURSTS

“Remember—every evil to which we do not succumb
is a benefactor”

IT was early in the month of July that Frank arrived in Swansea, and the place was thronged with visitors. As his hansom edged its way laboriously from the station he felt a thrill of pleasure. Smartly dressed men and gaily attired women were promenading by the sea, and the air was brisk and refreshing.

Mrs. Robinson lived in Oxford Street. He heard the bell ring, and then dismounted. The butler who opened the door to him seemed surprised, and listened to his questions with an air of diffidence.

“Madam never receives in the morning. She is not well to-day and is still in her room.”

“But she expects me, I believe. Take my card to her.”

The house was scented with flowers and ferns, and the hall floor covered with soft carpets. In the drawing-room Frank sat down to wait. There was a grand piano, and the skins of tigers and leopards rested on the couches and chairs. The walls were covered with framed manuscripts and

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signed photographs of celebrities. Over the fireplace was a large picture of Kathleen Robinson herself. The hair was coiled loosely around her head and neck, and the face appeared roguish and attractive.

A moment later the door opened, and he turned to greet his hostess.

"My dear Mr. Benson, I am so glad to see you. I have had a bad attack of headache, and nothing does me good at such times but complete rest."

He uttered a few commonplaces, and sat looking out at the sunlight and the sea.

"Come and talk to me," she said imperatively.

The widow had thrown herself on to a little sofa, and looked pleasing enough amid her surroundings. She was of medium height, with white skin and good teeth. Her dress was of a rich, clinging material, open at the neck and loose about the arms. She talked softly, laughing from time to time.

"So where is the charming negress?"

"I left my wife in Grand Bassa," replied Frank somewhat coldly. "She was unfit for travel."

"Really. Is she rich? But I suppose the daughters of all these Liberian planters are heiresses. Tell me something about Africa."

"Were you not there once some months with your husband?"

"Yes—in South Africa. But I saw nothing of the primitive side of native life."

She talked freely, and soon they were at dinner *tête-à-tête*. She saw from the constrained way in which he answered her questions regarding his married life that there was some slight mis-

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understanding between himself and his wife ; and with a woman's intuition she recognised that he was to blame.

"I am afraid that, like the majority of Englishmen, you are so used to being in a fog that you prefer to remain there. It is the secret of your success as a psychological novelist."

"You don't seem to respect your countrymen as you should," he replied, with a smile.

"I admire them immensely. The world has not yet seen, so far as history tells us, the equal of what they have become."

"Aristocracy as the throne, and democracy the crown."

"Without the monarch to possess either?" she asked sententiously.

"Dear me, no. The monarch is necessary to face the social problems."

"Such as that of the great unemployed, I suppose."

"Or that of the great overpaid," he answered.

"With a State system like ours . . ." she suggested, leaving the continuance of the subject in his hands.

"Take education. There is no further parental need of responsibility. The State educates ; and what, then, is the occasion of bringing up children when one can have them educated instead?"

He spoke banteringly. She had long since caught his mood.

"If only it included etiquette," she sighed, taking up an orange.

"You want too much for your money."

"Yes. In these sordid days we expect the

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guinea ticket for a box at the theatre to include a dress suit, or the six shillings paid for a novel to supply a bookcase."

"That reminds me. You must take me to a theatre."

"Where shall we go?" the widow asked.

"Anywhere."

She smiled up at him as he led her from the dining-room. As he placed the opera cloak around her shoulders he thought of Lily for the first time that evening. He compared the elusive freshness and purity of his wife's presence with the sentient figure of well-dressed reality by his side. What were they doing in Bassa to-night? Was his little one nestling on its mother's breast?

The play was a modern one: the story of a girl who left her home in the country to become the mistress of a man about town. Frank moved impatiently. His thoughts were ill.

"Marriage hasn't improved you, Mr. Benson. Are you eager to return? You haven't spoken a word to me for over an hour."

He apologised for his neglect in some contrition, and followed the new act more closely.

"*Were* you ever in love?" asked Kathleen, as she noticed his critical attitude. She leaned back behind the curtain of the box to look more closely at him.

"I am in love. But why ask such a strange question?"

"Oh, I was just wondering. You are a walking icicle—that's all."

It was an impassioned moment in the play. The girl was renouncing her lover with splendid heroics.

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From the stalls came low murmurs of approval ; the pit loudly applauded ; and the gallery screamed.

“Let us go,” she said, as the curtain fell. “You are worried, poor boy. I want to talk to you.”

In the carriage, while driving back to the house, she told him that she had sent to him for the sake of amusement. “You were a delightful boy two years ago, and played court in fine style.”

But she had seen that he was distressed, and before he was shown to his room that night he had poured the whole story of his troubles into her sympathetic ears. And because she was a woman she understood him, and he slept more peacefully than he had done since his return to England.

The following morning he went back to town. His next step seemed clear. While he was known to his old colleagues he would ever be a reproach to himself and the girl he had married. A month's close application would finish his work for Harmley, and the liberal payment would help him through the present year. Work, he knew to be the only true medicine for a mind harassed, and downright weariness would ensure him repose. He would have to use a *nom de plume* in many instances, and it might mean a recommencement of his career. If London could not hide him from inquisitive friends, no matter how kind and well-meaning their inquiries might be, he must seek another town.

The weeks passed. His punishment was more than he could bear. The articles appeared in their due course, and he read favourable opinions in almost every newspaper and review that came into

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the offices at the Temple. But what he had once known as distractions were now experiences of the most hideous kind. He declined every invitation that came to him. The literary clubs desired to fête him, and many great people invited him to dinner. He was compelled to refuse them all. The theatres he shunned, and it was remarked that he had grown sullen, reserved, self-centred. A note, received at this time from his father, unnerved him greatly :—

“ MY DEAR FRANK,

“ I have just received a letter from Grand Bassa. You will see that your late agent speaks of your conduct in no unmeasured terms. His judgment may appear unduly harsh and cruel ; but you must remember that Mr. Wrigley—whom I have not yet had the pleasure of meeting—is a man of large experience in the world, and I am well inclined to add my condemnation to his. Lily is a dear, gentle girl, and her life is wrapped up in yours. That you should have deserted her so remorselessly is a most dishonourable action. I should now suggest that you continue your absence for a period, and this course seems to have the approval of Mr. Wrigley. Make Paris your new home. I am sending you an introduction to an old school-mate of mine, Henry Dunbar. He is the editor of the *Revue Blanc*, so that your literary career will still be open to you. Put yourself unreservedly in his hands, and return to England cured of your mind-sickness.

“ Perhaps you will think I am speaking too authoritatively. It is true that for the last few

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years you have been a free agent, but your happiness, dear lad, is too near to my heart to allow you to drift into such a *morale* of perplexity as will take a lifetime for you to extricate yourself from. I have done much for you, and now I want you to repay me a little. You are our only child, and I am yet looking forward to having Lily and my little grandson (it is a boy) in my home, with you in happy possession. Don't you remember your promise that Eldon Green should be made your headquarters?

“Mother sends her love, but for both your sakes I have forbidden her to write.

“Your affectionate father,

“CREIGHTON BENSON.”

Frank read the letter sentence for sentence several times, and a mist swam before his eyes. His father: so merry, so caustic, so indulgent. He saw him in every strongly written word. He would obey him. This visit to Paris would practically mean a restarting of his life, but that did not matter.

A month later he was settled in his new home. And now he had fresh reasons for contempt and disgust of his work. Apart from the inflexibility of the language in which he was compelled by mundane needs to write during two days of each week, he had an increasing difficulty in the construction of his English. But he worked enormously, and his unsigned articles found a ready acceptance in both Paris and London. His work, however, gave him no satisfaction; nevertheless,

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it was the only thing that partly lifted from his mind the burden of regret.

There came a day in the New Year when he had nothing to write about. A letter from Harmley lay on his desk dated for the previous November : "The West African series was such a success that both Henry and myself would like a further six articles. You might strike out in a new direction, as you have consistently refused to have your matter signed since you left London in the summer. Suppose you send us a few idylls? We remember your *Musings* of five years ago, and are convinced that you could succeed in satisfying the public."

The wind was blowing freely from the Seine. Thoughts of Lily and their child were oppressing him, and work did not seem to assuage the dull pain. The constant endeavour to forget only resulted in a more persistent remembrance. He would write Lily's story. Perhaps this would prove to be the true anodyne. The daring thought charmed him, and he commenced to write.

The spring had not passed before the fulfilment of his conception had come. The Harmleys' cheques were large and their praises extravagant. The reading public was moved as it is but rarely moved, and the expression of his sorrow thrilled many a heart. From the first page to the last of his manuscript there was no mention of Lily, the flower of Grand Bassa, or of himself. But through each one of the idylls moved the mystery and the sympathetic gloom of the coast, the bush, the negro.

Yet he loathed himself when he thought that Lily had become "copy" for him. "How true

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it is that familiarity breeds contempt!" he exclaimed in dreary soliloquy. "To the miller the rippling stream is merely so much water placed at his hand by a merciful Providence in order that he might grind his corn. For the farmer the gleaming harvest-field is nothing but stock. To the undertaker death means funerals and gravestones, accompanied by speculation as to the depth of the chief mourner's pocket. For the journalist, the author, the throbbing tragedy of life becomes manuscript at four guineas per thousand words." In self-abasement he wondered how long he would continue to see remuneration in the innocent girl whom he had wronged. But, in the meantime, the great British public was stirred, and the publishers of his earlier books clamoured for the rights of the idylls. "Others may be blind," they wrote, "and Harmley wouldn't give us any satisfaction regarding the authorship of these sketches; but we knew that only one man could write with the excess of sentiments shown and yet be wholly pleasing. You must give us the volume."

The face of Lily was with him always. Now he saw that this desertion would appear quite unintelligible to her. Perhaps she had learnt to hate him. There was poison in the thought. He could see her fighting bravely against the innuendoes of the people in Bassa, parrying in his defence their suggestions of his baseness, believing in him to the last. He knew too well that he had but to return to her arms to be forgiven. And so three weeks later he was writing home.

"In answer to your query in the letter just to hand, and your complaint that I have said very

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little about my environments, this place is thought to be very handsome. But I am inclined to the belief that a certain tiny park in Manchester would appear more attractive to me at present. I have loved Paris always, and I do not recall a prettier picture from nature's gallery than that presented by the gay city with the full glow of summer upon her face. You will recall me as soon as possible, won't you? You see, I am speaking as though I were under the parental roof again, and had not the responsibilities of manhood. But you will understand me, I know. Your old schoolmate, Dunbar, as I have written before, is kindness itself, and does not bother me with embarrassing questions. His opinions are strangely attractive to me. We were talking last night of posthumous fame, and he said: 'Surely it is the most valuable! It is little use making the world talk of you while you are alive, for calumny is almost inevitable. While I live I can see all the people that I want to see, and my presence is far more real than if I offered them a volume of my essays for perusal. To be spoken of by the men of two hundred years hence would be a great thing; but I shall not attain to this. What I confess to caring for is that the pace of the public's forgetfulness be modulated, and that I may be remembered for the fifty years immediately following decease. Death is generally too sudden to be welcome: but if his work can be softened by the promise of a posthumous fame, his presence should more frequently be desired.' He is very bright company, and I delight to spend the evenings with him. He has seen almost everything, and reads in several

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languages. No news from Bassa, you tell me? I sometimes forget your determination of a year ago that you would not interfere, and wish that I knew something of my dear ones. But I am looking forward to a reconciliation at no distant date. Greetings."

Although he wrote home so hopefully, and his face smiled as he occupied himself at his desk, pain was at his heart. A new novel had been planned in his usually systematic way, and he wrote with the zest of genuine feeling. A walk on the boulevards would bring back to his recollection scenes of two summers ago, when Lily and he had paced them together. There were the flowers that his girl-wife had admired and coaxed him to buy, the wonderful shops before which she had paused in bright amaze, the richly sculptured buildings they had passed through. And one day in August he sat with his head bent low, listening dreamily to the chattering of the birds above him.

"Papa, papa, je vous regarde. Ah! méchant papa." A little hand touched him on the knee, and a pair of dark, eager eyes looked into his downcast face. The little one had strayed from his nurse, and lifted up his arms trustfully to be taken on Benson's knee. Frank immediately responded, and a course of whispered confidences came from both. For nearly half an hour the man talked airy nonsense to the child in nursery French.

The mother appeared, in great distress, at the end of what had been only a brief period to Frank. The dusk was falling. The woman was young and dark, and her dress was of simple

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black. Had she turned her head away he would have exclaimed involuntarily, "Lily!"

"Ah, garçon, garçon, vous êtes méchant," she said in a voice of freshness and heart's love. The little boy was reluctant to go. "Papa voici," he said shrilly, "Voici mon papa."

Long after they had disappeared down the path Benson sat there. "Papa! Here is papa!" He remembered the night when Lily had awakened him to the sound of her sorrow. Then he had promised to be good to her. "Ah, méchant papa." The little voice still rang on. And this was the outcome of his vow: desertion; base, despicable desertion.

He bowed his head in his hands as the darkness fell, and hard, dry sobs came from his throat. Far away a bird was calling to her mate.

CHAPTER XXXI

FOREBODINGS

“Fear is an enemy to life”

LILY was not confident of her husband. Of his love and devotion she was sure, but not of the man himself, complex, emotional. His was a refined, lovable nature she knew, but strangely ruled by his many misconceptions of the proportion of things. She could not bring herself to doubt his fidelity, but none the less did a thread of anxiety weave itself through her consciousness as she watched the boat heaving towards the steamer that was to carry him away from her. She could form some definite idea of how her father, or Jack, or Mr. Wrigley would act under certain given circumstances, but of Frank Benson's vagaries she had no adequate conception. And yet—how she knew him: a thousand times better than the woman whose pangs at birth had paid the toll for his life.

Many women, black and white, have endeavoured to solve this vague problem. And most of them have sedulously shut their eyes, lest they should find the answer to the riddle, and the revelation should be disastrous to their love. And such was Lily's attitude now. She had a smile on her face

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and a pain at her heart. She knew the subtle inaccuracies of Frank's character, and she loved him all the more fervently because of them. If he had not been born with this wondrously fascinating weakness, this complex instability, his genius might have been mute. So she waved her handkerchief from the piazza as long as the boat remained in sight, and when the mists had swallowed up the steamer she turned into the house quite contentedly. But after dinner had been cleared away she began to feel an aching numbness at her heart. She sat gazing silently out to sea. The motherly breast of Mrs. Wrigley received her when she tottered into that lady's room at the close of an hour's despondent musings.

"Why didn't you press the point and go with him, child? The change would have done you good, and you might have reached the islands before . . ."

"But suppose I had fallen ill on the steamer. No; I am better here, and I have always the baby to think of. I shall be very busy indeed during the next few days."

The elder woman only pressed her closer.

"Do you know, Mrs. Wrigley, when I was a child I could never reconcile myself to work of a household nature? But mother always insisted upon me learning to sew neatly. I am glad. Because—because now I can do all the linen myself."

And then there came a great restlessness upon her, and she would take long, dreary walks. Frank was very dear to her in these days, and she seemed to be journeying with him to the land of pleasure

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and enjoyment. There is a little hill outside the town from which the ocean can be viewed in one wide expanse of blue—to east and to west. Here she spent many hours, and the setting sun would find her looking England-wards, a slim, dainty figure in white and red.

Her baby was born three weeks later, and she looked eagerly forward to a letter in the course of another few days. She believed that Frank's absence would only be a brief one, and she hummed merrily as she lay between the sheets with the downy head of her boy upon her bosom. But temperament is beyond the governance of expectation, and her heart was sick with a terrible longing within an hour of her most exalted moods.

Late in the month an English steamer arrived in the harbour. All day long the rain had been drizzling down, and the sea wore an ashen and sober colour. The air was heavy and disquieting. Lily tried to be cheerful, but as the rain dripped upon the panes of the open window she shivered apprehensively.

She rang the little bell at the side of her bed for the boy. His little woolly head appeared at the door, and Mrs. Wrigley followed him.

“The mails?” asked Lily eagerly.

“They will not be delivered to-night. It is too late now. We shall have them early to-morrow morning.”

Mrs. Wrigley did her best to fight down the morbidness that had obsessed the mind of the young wife. She read to her from a favourite volume, and when the curtains had been drawn, and the lamps were cheerfully burning, the sooth-

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ing effect of her voice began to make itself apparent. But when the volume of Carey had been laid aside, and the agent came in from his papers and accounts, conversation languished. Ever the rain sounded, broken by intermittent rolls of thunder and livid flashes of lightning—obtuse, tortuous, complex.

When the mails were delivered in the morning there was nothing for Lily. Frank's letter from Liverpool had not yet arrived. From the dining-room, busy with her list of household requisites, Mrs. Wrigley heard the sound of sobbing in the bedroom. She looked round incredulously, then put down her pencil and hurried to the girl. Lily was lying with her face to the wall, weeping with an abandon that shook her shoulders spasmodically. The baby had commenced a feeble wail.

"What is it, dear?" she asked, sitting down by her, and endeavouring to lift her into a sitting posture. "You mustn't cry like that. Remember the baby. Tell me, why are you crying?"

But Lily's disappointment and grief were too abject, and she could not answer. Thoroughly sympathetic, Mrs. Wrigley held her in her arms, and continued her solicitations.

"Perhaps someone has hurt you. Who has been this morning? Was it Maggie or Jack? Or perhaps Ralph has said something to you he shouldn't have done. What is it, dear?"

"I—I am afraid that Frank is ill or that something has happened."

"Nonsense!" said the matron heartily. "What should happen to him, child? Haven't you made the voyage twice yourself? And he has had no real time to write to you yet. If he came back by

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a steamer of next month I shouldn't be surprised. You may rest assured that he won't stay away from you too long. Especially——”

She took up the boy, and handed it to Lily.

“Oh, don't,” cried the girl piteously, and she laid the little one down again. “I am not worthy—I am not worthy. I am very unhappy indeed.”

The sea was crooning lazily. Mrs. Wrigley looked at her patient in some doubt.

“You must make an effort, Lily, for baby's sake. Remember, he is a boy, the picture of Frank. Just think! He may grow up to be a great man, and he will be proud of his mother. Isn't that hope worth thinking of?”

Lily still repulsed the baby, and buried her face in the pillow with a sob.

Mrs. Wrigley was not emotional. Experience of the joys and sorrows of the people among whom she had lived so long had given her a practical turn of mind. She grasped the situation at once. Lily thought that she had driven her husband away. “Frank will be back soon,” she said encouragingly.

“It isn't that,” the girl gasped painfully. “At least, his absence is not everything. I was hard and cross, and he could never bear that kind of thing. He must have grown tired of me altogether, or he would not have gone.”

Mrs. Wrigley saw that for the time being Lily was a child—spoiled, petted. She treated her in the same way that she would have treated Maggie ten years before. Her voice was kindly firm.

“You have been worrying too much. I will send you a cup of good tea, and as soon as possible

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will sit with you. Then you must have a good sleep. To-morrow you will be quite happy again."

When everything had been carried out as she proposed, and Lily had gratefully swallowed the food, she kissed her tenderly. "I will read Longfellow to you for a time. Then you must rest."

An hour later Lily was sleeping peacefully, her little one gently clasped to her breast. And when the morning came in bright and green, with a wind freshening from the sea, she had forgotten all her fears.

"You slept well?" asked Mrs. Wrigley, as she opened the windows to the breeze. "At all events your face is happier."

"Oh yes," said Lily thankfully. "I am quite ashamed for my outburst of petulance. You must have thought me a little goose."

"Not at all, my dear. We all have our troubles, and the last few weeks have unsettled your peace of mind. It won't be long before we hear something from England. There will be another steamer next week. I daresay he is longing now for the end of his self-imposed probation."

"I will not be impatient, though his absence is a great pain to me. How proud he will be of the baby! What shall we call him? Frank? Ah, that will be lovely."

Her powers of self-possession were proven during the next few days. She was now walking about the house, though weak and listless. But her manner remained uniformly hopeful and cheery. The outward-bound vessel appeared on the horizon at the appointed date, and as soon as the mail-boat had

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reached the shore she took down her hat. "I will receive my letters myself," she said.

The agent laughed as he changed his coat to accompany her.

"I will come with you. The firm's letters have to be received. It would be too heavy a task for you, Lily."

"There will be a letter for me, I know," she said, with unerring instinct.

"I don't doubt it." They passed out of the house together and into the shady lane. Mrs. Wrigley watched them from the piazza. Her reflections as she busied herself with household matters were not satisfactory. A vague unrest was upon her, and she unconsciously connected this with Lily. "Why, what can happen to the child?" she cried to herself derisively.

The hour had passed from ten to eleven before she looked up from her table. "There must be a very big mail," she said. "Or perhaps that fellow Onnet is still fumbling with the bags. It is disgraceful the system upon which the postal authorities work in Liberia. They are as old-fashioned as Adam and as antiquated as the Pharaohs. Why, breakfast will be over an hour late!"

This was Mrs. Wrigley's special weakness. Meals must be punctual. If eleven o'clock was the hour appointed for breakfast, then breakfast must be on the table prompt to time. "Where can Ralph be? And what keeps Lily?" she said again. The house-boys laid the cloth and asked whether they should send in the soup. Unwilling to begin alone, she went on to the piazza and stood leaning on the rail.

She waited until one o'clock, and then a little

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crowd of people appeared upon the road. They were coming from the direction of the post office, and Mrs. Wrigley saluted them with relief. As they came nearer she saw her husband carrying his letters, and then she descried Lily leaning on his arm. There was a distinct difference in her appearance. She left the small knot of people with a sickly smile of thanks.

“Did you get a letter?” the matron asked, as she followed the girl into the house.

“Yes. I got a letter.” She spoke quietly, and her face was pale. Her voice sounded toneless, empty, dull.

“I suppose he will be back soon? Has he made the nice arrangements with his publishers?”

“He says that he doesn’t know the date of his return.”

Mrs. Wrigley was perplexed.

“What news has he to tell you? Are his people well?”

“He does not say much; only that he will be away a long time.”

“Away a long time, and you alone here with the child!” cried Mrs. Wrigley indignantly. “What can the man mean? What is there to keep him in London? Why didn’t he speak openly before he went away instead of playing the dastard like this?”

The agent had been talking quietly on the stairs with the Liberians, and now he entered. He looked with solicitude at the young wife.

“Come, Lily, child, let me read your letter,” he said gently.

Lily drew back convulsively.

“No. It only concerns me. Frank is well,

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but business detains him in London, and the date of his return is uncertain. I daresay he made up his mind quite suddenly, and his decision is as hasty. Perhaps Harmley is to detain him. I know that he was upset about his series of articles."

She was fighting for her honour. Her eyes were piteous, and her mouth trembled painfully. "He only said 'Au revoir,' and he cannot be long away. Let us have breakfast."

While the meal was in progress she was in evident distress. "Do you know that the child fainted when she opened her letter, mother?" asked the agent. "There was quite a large number of people at the office, and several of them came back with us." He had been very much attached to Benson, and his marriage with Lily Summerton had pleased him greatly. But he looked with disapproval upon his recent trip, and was inwardly fuming now at his neglect of the girl-wife. Lily did not believe that he had deserted her finally. She knew that he was essentially a creature of caprice, and believed unswervingly that he only meant to test her faith in him. He belonged to the town, and he would surely recognise that her happiness depended not upon environment, not upon either affluence or poverty, but upon his presence. A few weeks hence he would send for her.

Meantime she had to subdue the criticism of Mr. and Mrs. Wrigley, and convince them that Frank's actions were wise. She succeeded only in a poor degree, and with her little one at her breast she felt that arguments in favour of his absence were futile. All the night she lay sleeplessly

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counting the long rushes of the waves on to the beach, or listening to the hum of the night insects.

The weeks fled by, and every steamer found her waiting eagerly for news. "There will be a letter to-day," she said, with a pretty blush. "He will have almost finished his work now, and I know his return will be unexpected. He will be writing to me to-day, I know."

The agent and his wife looked on dumbly, and at last in hot anger Wrigley wrote to the father of the young man whom he had loved. "I cannot forget how much he was to me, dear sir, but if you could see the drawn lines of pain on Lily's face you would understand my anger. This suggestion may appear paradoxical, but his absence for a time is best. Meanwhile I shall prepare the girl's mind for a reconciliation. Their happiness depends upon the renewal of their relations being upon permanent lines. I know Frank, and I am confident that he must learn his lesson slowly. It is some months now since he left Bassa, and, God willing, another six will see the young people happy again."

CHAPTER XXXII

HOPELESSLY ALONE

“Happiness was born a twin”

AND now Lily began to search the magazines for news of her husband. The anonymous articles in *Harmley's* thrilled her. She read the sorrow between the lines. “He is not happy,” she said.

She left the house on a fair morning in September to receive her books and papers. Almost she had grown callous about the quest of a letter from Frank. Each of his idylls seemed like a message sent to herself alone, and she felt strangely comforted by their perusal.

The mail-boat had only just left the side of the steamer. She knew that it would be over an hour before the mails were ready for distribution, so she turned in the direction of Buchanan. Her child was thriving, and had been named after his father. She carried it forward in her arms now, a bundle of delicate whites and greens. As she neared the house that had once been her home she paused irresolutely. “Not to-day,” she murmured, “I must not look at the old place again until Frank is back in Bassa.”

She sat down on a fallen tree. The boat was

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coming in the distance, the Liberian flag floating from its prow. Tiny lizards basked in the sunlight, and mosses of grey and scarlet, orange and green, grew on the gnarled trunk. The boat had touched the beach, and the mail-bags had disappeared into the little post office before she retraced her steps to the town. There were a good number of packets for her, and one of them contained *Harmley's*. She opened it at the usual page—the one page that interested her. There was a paragraph framed in thick black type.

“We learn with regret, at the moment of going to press, that one of the brightest of our young writers has died in Paris. Frank Benson always struck a strenuous note, and the series of idylls under the title of *The African at Home*, which has been appearing in our pages since June last, will enhance the fame which his earlier volumes had already secured. The cause of his death we have not learned in detail, but it is believed that he died from poison, self-administered. It will be remembered that he married a Liberian girl last year, and during the months that he spent with us in the Temple, prior to his visit to Paris, we observed that he was very constrained and ill at ease. We can only suppose that some matrimonial difficulty had resulted from his selection of a wife, and it is understood that he has left a little one behind him in Grand Bassa.

“There are established reputations that need no defence. Frank Benson's was a nature that would have no half-measures. Fiction was to him an art, and he was a careful observer of life. He has given to the world three or four wholesome, sane,

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and interesting volumes. In his books are no impossible situations, no impossible characters. His untimely death, while still in the spring of youth, has deprived us of an author who promised to be one of our most brilliant men. We call the attention of our readers to the present idyll, "How Death came to Him," and this should prove of peculiar interest in view of the author's own tragic decease."

Mrs. Wrigley had been at no loss for occupations during Lily's absence. The garden gate clattered, and she looked down into the lane. Her husband was at his desk, and he cried out, "Mother, here comes Lily." A moment later Lily's foot could be heard ascending the stairs. She faltered at the door of the dining-room, and the agent and his wife knew without speaking that something terrible had happened. Mrs. Wrigley took the baby from her arms.

"What is the matter? Has anything occurred? Have you had another letter from England?"

"No. I have had no letter," replied Lily chokingly.

"Then what is it?"

"I have killed him. It was all my fault. He loved me always, and I did wrong to marry him. Oh, what have I done that this should have happened?"

She held out the open magazine despairingly. Mr. Wrigley looked at it with a swift glance of comprehension. A pitiful little cry came from the girl. She was fainting. He held out his arm and caught her as she fell.

For many days Benson's death seemed a thing

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incomprehensible to the people of Grand Bassa, and the news fell like a thunderbolt upon Lily. Since the first of his idylls had reached her in the magazines she had felt more contented. His voice had spoken to her constantly. Now she was so far stunned by the news as to be incapable of realising that he would hereafter write from the grave. There would be several of his manuscripts scattered among the London periodicals, and these would all be published with his name above them as "the late Frank Benson." Her cousin, Jack Summerton, sent the last number of *Better Things* to her, and she saw one of her husband's articles on the front page, with an affectionate memoir inside.

Mrs. Wrigley talked to her with infinite tenderness at this time, and strove to comfort her by every means in her power. But she was conscious of a subtle constraint between them, and her best efforts fell fruitless to the ground. She wanted to talk of the dead man, but Lily would not permit this liberty.

"You must never speak of him as though he had sinned," she insisted. "He was always the soul of honour, and I know that he died thinking that it would make me happier; not to relieve himself of misery. Do you think that I could carry his name if he had died for selfish ends? You must tell the people here that he died suddenly. That is all. He did not take the step lightly, rest assured. I do not understand why, but he must have believed that no other way was open. I must live alone."

Both the agent and his wife became singularly diplomatic after this. The Liberians had admired

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the young Englishman, and had looked up to him as a being removed from the ordinary run of things material. They were sympathetic and not a little curious. Why had Benson gone so suddenly to England? And why had he developed so strange a manner after his marriage with Lily Summerton?

From being an object of interest and pity the girl gradually became the greatest mystery in the neighbourhood. Why had she so many English novels sent over from England? And why did she look so coldly at her neighbours? "But she don't give herself away much these days," said Ben Onnet, the postmaster, as he sat on the rickety stairs of the office. Lily had just walked past with her little one. "She is very close, I reckon." His companions agreed, and they looked after the retreating white form with grunts and smiles and significant nods.

The lawyer wrote from the Temple enclosing the usual monthly cheque on Frank's account. It was a formal note of deliverance and contained no word regarding the future. Man is generally stupid, and Benson had failed to see that his provision for Lily would probably be the most cruel thing that he could possibly do. Mrs. Wrigley received the letter from the girl's hand with a look of encouragement.

"You mustn't be unnerved, child," she said. "Both myself and Ralph want you here for a long time yet. But had we not better write to Frank's people at Manchester? They will probably want you to go to them."

Lily gave her consent reluctantly. The knowledge that Mr. and Mrs. Benson would feel it their

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duty to take over the responsibility of her happiness distressed her infinitely. From inquirers she received little sympathy, and she began to hide her sorrow. During the next few weeks she developed a talent for subterfuge that astounded her house-mates. The Liberians had now seen a copy of the English magazine containing Benson's death, and their comments were free and candid. Lily did not know the extent to which her affairs were being discussed, or she would have been even more distraught. She played her part wonderfully, and the strain was intolerable. Her face assumed an awful pallor, and her eyes became restless, feverish, uneasy. Once her voice had been fresh and cheerful; now it was pathetic and quiet. Looking at her, Mrs. Wrigley's indignation towards the husband was undiminished.

The girl spent many hours among her flowers. The African summer was near, and the greenness and freshness of the fields comforted her. Her roses, with their fragrance and prettiness, tempted her to a larger tenderness. She carried a bunch into the house, and arranged them on the table.

"You are looking sad and pale, Lily," said Mrs. Wrigley, who was sewing busily at the window. "You must have a sea trip. Shall we send you down to Monrovia or Cape Palmas by the next steamer?"

Lily bent over her flowers. "I am well enough, thank you. I don't think I need a holiday."

"I know only one thing that would bring the colour into your face. If Frank were alive and able to come back to you!"

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The girl was still fingering the roses. "Yes," she said; "I have thought that myself. It is strange we have had no confirmation of the news of his death from Manchester."

But she continued to droop, and a doctor had to be called in. She was listless and indifferent. On his second visit he spoke earnestly to Mrs. Wrigley. "If our patient does not brighten up, she will succumb. What are the circumstances of her widowhood?"

Mrs. Wrigley's expression was one of despair. "I cannot tell you. He died in Paris quite suddenly early last month, and had been separated from her for some time before that. There was nothing but love between them, but he was called to England on business. After his arrival he sent a letter saying that he had decided to remain in Europe. He promised to come back at some indefinite date, and Lily has never looked up since. She heard that he was dead."

"Is there any doubt about his death? Have you heard from his people?"

"No. Our only source of information is a paragraph in *Harmley's Magazine*."

The doctor was off one of the passing steamers, and he was in a hurry to get back on board.

"I never met the man," he said, "but he must have been a queer fellow to desert a dear little thing like that. I would advise you to write to England at once."

"We are writing by this steamer," said the matron.

"I hope the news will be good! If he is really dead it will go ill with Mrs. Benson. And if he

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is alive, and does not recall his wife at once, he will find himself a widower."

A fortnight later Mr. Wrigley received a letter in an unknown hand. He opened it in some surprise, and after reading the opening sentences, called to his wife. Together they read it breathlessly, and the agent's eyes glittered. "You must go to her," he said.

Lily had not left her bed for three days. Mrs. Wrigley paused at the open door of her room with her finger on her lips. Her husband tiptoed to her side and looked in. Lily was sitting up in bed, her face buried in a bunch of red and white blossoms. Her hair was loose, and fell over her shoulders as in the days of old. Her lips were moving, and they heard her murmur :—

*" Wallflower, lilac, violet,
Pansy, mimosa, mignonette,
Coronella, tulip, broom,
Thyme, and roses sweetly bloom.
O'er the hot sand in the sun
Tiny lizards bask and run,
For . . . "*

She looked up and smiled faintly. "Do you remember those lines of Frank's?" she asked. "He wrote them the day after he met me, three years ago."

Mrs. Wrigley seated herself at the side of the bed. "You are a little better to-day, dear?" she asked. "The doctor was quite pleased with your appearance." In view of the letter which she held in her hand she lied glibly. "He says there is a wonderful improvement since he saw you last night."

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Lily played with the stems of the buds. "Is it only a night since we saw him before? It seems an age. Oh, if Frank could come back to me! He cannot be dead."

Mrs. Wrigley was silent for a few minutes. The news would be too overwhelming if she spoke in a hurry. The girl's face was white and her eyes were sad. She laid aside the flowers with a sigh of complete dejection.

"There is news from England, Lily. . . . Do you really continue to love Frank Benson, or the memory of him?"

"With all my heart. I feel that I cannot go on living without him. If he is dead, then I shall die too."

"And if he is alive, will you continue to live?"

Lily flushed and leaned forward eagerly. "Speak," she cried in a tense whisper. "What do you know?"

"See!" Mrs. Wrigley laid the letter on the sheet. "I will leave you for a time. It is from a friend of Frank's. Do you think you can muster enough strength to travel to England?"

The girl was elated, transformed, reviviscent. "Come back to me soon," she said. "I knew that there was good news coming. Frank can't be dead. It is because I have been weakening to despair that all my strength has left me. I will go to him if he is sick, and make him well again. He will be so glad to see me; and then there is little Frank."

Mrs. Wrigley left the room, and Lily read her letter slowly, and with panting breath.

Hopelessly Alone

“59, RUE RIVOLI.

“Ralph Wrigley, Esq., Grand Bassa.

“MY DEAR SIR,—No doubt this letter will surprise you a little, as it is many months since I had occasion to visit the West Coast, and you may have forgotten me. It is only the great interest I feel in the young journalist who spent two years with you in Bassa which persuades me to write to you. I am spending the autumn in Paris, and here I met Benson in one of the cafés. I had been observing his progress with some interest, and his articles in the English magazines had convinced me of his genius. But I noticed a growing despondency in his bearing, and marked his misery with concern.”

“Who is the writer?” murmured Lily. The penmanship was unfamiliar. She turned to the signature, “E. A. Sutcliffe Pyne.”

The letter continued: “You are probably aware of the principal reason of his voyage to England last year. Perhaps you have more data than myself. I cannot tell you what led him to take the step which resulted in the announcement of his death. I have my own conjectures, of course, and the wife he has left behind him is connected with them. He was very depressed, and in the course of conversation with me spoke very feelingly of the young lady. I take it that he had absented himself without due reason, and was then too ashamed to return. A few weeks after our first meeting I called at his rooms to find him in the condition which had the effect of leading to a serious illness. He had taken strychnine. For

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many days we deemed recovery impossible, and this fact led to the pre-announcement of his death. He is now convalescent, I am pleased to say. Mr. Benson has just travelled to Paris, and asks that Frank shall return to Manchester at an early opportunity. I sincerely trust that the false news has not upset you. It is extremely difficult to controvert these statements once they have been put into circulation. . . .”

Lily read no more. Nothing further mattered. Frank was alive. His object had failed. A great surge of joy robbed her of every faculty of feeling. She closed her eyes, and the letter fluttered to the floor.

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE FULFILMENT OF THE EMOTIONAL IDEA

“Govern yourself, be true to the best in yourself, and you
will be happy”

BENSON sat on the verandah of the house in the Rue Rivoli and meditated. His friend Pyne had just left. In his hand he held a letter from his father: “You may expect me within a week.” The reflections that held his mind were of a desultory kind, if one might judge from his face. But that they were not altogether unpleasant was evident. From below him came the innumerable cries of the street, strong, persistent. A brown-faced *bonne* would occasionally pass with her children, and a pavement artist was obliterating his yesterday’s pictures across the way, preparatory to opening his new academy.

“Poor fellow!” thought Frank lazily. “He must be a student from the Latin Quarter fallen on evil days.” He took quite an interest in the progress of the new pictures. Soon the man took off his coat and attacked the pavement in real earnest. Within an hour there were half a dozen highly coloured sketches stretched over the flags. A girl was crying her flowers. “*Violettes! Roses! Fleur*

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*de lis ! Des fleurs pour embaumer la maison !
Violettes !*"

What final feeling of despondency had decided Frank to attempt suicide it would be hard to say. It was a year now since he had come to Paris at the suggestion of his father ; a year and a half since he had left Grand Bassa. He looked back upon his early married experiences with deep regret, and recognised his follies. His one present wish was to arrange a speedy reconciliation. The servant aroused him from his thoughts. She carried a card.

"The gentleman he no say his name. But he looks like monsieur." Frank glanced at the card, and his father entered quickly. They looked at each other for a moment in some embarrassment.

"Dad, I am awfully pleased to see you," exclaimed the young man. His looks did not contradict the tone in which he spoke. "It seems an age since we met before, doesn't it?"

"You seem to have bettered by the change, lad, despite the—— But never mind that now. How long is it since you learned to waste your time? I have been watching you for the last hour from the window of the hotel opposite."

"Oh! one learns wisdom in Paris. I remember how you used to upbraid me because of my excessive energy. Since I have awakened from my dream, or—I should say—since the nightmare of the past year has been thrown off, I have fallen back into the mood that possessed me when first I met Lily. I delight in thinking of anything or nothing now. From the time of my illness-I have done nothing at my manuscripts."

The father smiled, and they drifted into the kind

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of broken talk which it had been their custom to use in the older days. It was decided ultimately that Frank should return to Manchester, and from thence write to Lily.

On the day before they were ready to depart Pyne called. The morning had a touch of cold, and the east wind was blowing across the roads, swirling dust into little clouds, and eddying the water in the fountain basins of the square.

The clocks were chiming eleven, and the father and son were partaking of a late breakfast. Pyne walked in with his unconcerned gait, and the men greeted each other cordially.

"Will you have some breakfast?" asked Frank, drawing up another chair.

"Delighted." He sat down at the table and made himself comfortable. It was one of his characteristics that he never entered a friend's house without making an elaborate show of meaning to stay an indefinite time.

"I was pleased when I heard that you were in Paris, Mr. Benson, and I felt that I must come round and say good-bye before you went away. Next month I have to go to China. Colonel Kelly has exhausted the West Coast of Africa, and my publishers are inexorable in their demands for copy. Of course I might sit down and collect my descriptive material from the British Museum." His eyes twinkled. "I know that two of our best novels upon the Holy Land were written without a visit. But I always like to do things properly myself."

Mr. Benson and Frank listened amusedly, and the famous journalist rattled on.

"I was talking about Frank at the club just

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before I left London. Quite a coincidence that I should find him here, wasn't it? I never dreamed that he had hidden himself in Paris. There was Phillips and Yates and old Harding. You will remember old Harding, Frank? Wrote the book that Chambers dramatised last season with such success. Swears a great deal, and is fond of the ladies. He asked particularly after you—wanted to know where your blasted fame was, and so on. It seemed a pity (I am quoting him, so don't take offence. Of course, I know Mrs. Frank Benson, and that makes all the difference) that one of the most brilliant young journalists living should be silenced by a damned black girl. He didn't know then that the Harmley articles were yours, or he would have spoken differently."

Frank's face had flushed hotly, and his eyes flashed. But he rose from the table with a laugh.

"Poor old Harding! He doesn't know one half the truth, or he would curse me instead of Lily."

They sat out on the verandah, and Frank produced his wines. "I have some Chartreuse for you, dad. You take whisky, don't you, Pyne?"

The originator of Colonel Kelly laughed. "Thanks, old chap. I am delighted to see that your recent escapade hasn't spoiled your memory. Whisky for travellers, wines for stay-at-homes."

He liberally helped himself, and then sat watch-the passers-by. Frank rolled cigarettes for them all, and there was a long silence while they puffed out the blue smoke.

Mr. Benson broke the silence. "I think you mentioned in one of your letters that Mr. Pyne

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had been married thrice—or was it four times? The position appears rather illogical when one remembers how much he has travelled.”

Frank laughed gaily. “Tell us, Pyne, old man, who is the latest lady—the one who is the most wonderful, most sympathetic, most idyllic creature that you have ever seen, not excepting the sweet wives who are underneath the ground.”

Pyne moved a trifle uneasily.

“You are always joking me about my weakness; but when I get a wife I don't run away from her, you know. You are right, all the same. I am a widower again, and the present little woman is to marry me before I sail. I must introduce you to her in London if we have time. She is so bright and merry. By Jove! an hour's talk with her gave me copy enough to last a week.”

“Is she a widow? But I forgot—that goes without saying.”

“Yes. Her husbands—she was married twice—did not treat her at all well. One was an Indian officer on leave, and he basely left her behind him three weeks after marriage.” He paused in some amazement as his companion laughed.

“Why, my dear Pyne, isn't that your usual course? Your wives have never travelled with you.”

“This one is different. She will accompany me to China.”

He drank some more whisky with appreciation.

“But let us leave my affairs, and talk of someone else. I suppose there can be no doubt of Frank's position now? His happiness ought to be assured.”

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He looked dubiously at the younger journalist.

"It is a perplexing question why women care so much for us," he continued. "But I am convinced that that little Liberian girl is only waiting to be asked for forgiveness. Until recently Frank had used to disturb my confidence. He often struck me as being cold and reserved. But I haven't much fear now."

Frank filled a glass of wine for himself. "Don't spare me, Pyne. I know that I have much to learn. I shall try to make Lily happy, I swear."

"You seemed to me—I speak candidly—to be the kind of man who would break a woman's heart for the sake of a caprice or a whim. Your æsthetic tastes made you delight in mental excitement, and you morbidly enjoyed the pain of separation. I know what women are, Frank, and with a man of your temperament for a husband, they would die sooner than break a silence."

The young man leaned over and pressed his hand. He had never cared for Pyne so much as he did at this moment. His words were profound, and he realised the truth of them.

"Father, I will cable for Lily, and thus pave the way for my letter," he said suddenly. "Poor child! I ought to have remembered her position long ago, instead of leaving her to waste her precious youth alone."

After Pyne had bidden him good-bye in the event of their not meeting again before his voyage to China, and his father had gone to his hotel to finish packing, he sat in the window musing, and his thoughts turned incessantly to Grand Bassa and to Lily. A year and a half since he had seen her,—

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eighteen long months of toil! He drew from his pocket one of the little notes which she had written to him upon some trifling matter during their engagement in Liberia, and looked at the delicate superscription. Never since he had left her had she seemed so near to him as now while he read her words of confidence and faith. Here, in this same rue, they had sat and talked, they had loved to quarrel and to make it up again. Oh! the sweet atonement of kisses and caresses. Walking through yonder leafy avenues she had given him tender glimpses of her fantastic thoughts, fresh and wild and childlike. She had been serious and gay by turns.

Why had he left her? He had gone away, he told himself persuasively, because he had been afraid of the situation. Their temperaments were different, and he had thought that misery would ensue if they dwelt together. But the argument seemed weak, foolish, ridiculous. He loved her; she loved him. What else mattered? Rising hastily, he took up his pen and tore down a piece of paper from the hook above his desk.

"Forgive and return. Manchester our home always. I love you. Come, Frank."

He wrote eagerly and rang the bell. "Take this cable to the post office at once," he said to the girl, handing her two sovereigns, "and then call at the hotel and tell my father that I wish to see him in my rooms."

What would Lily be doing, he wondered, when his cable arrived? With the fascination of his love upon him he wrote a passionate plea for forgiveness, sealed it, and then turned to his task of

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stripping his wall of their photograph with a more satisfied conscience.

It was a particularly bright and sunny day in October when Frank and his father returned to Manchester. To be appropriate to his neglect and folly Frank felt that the weather should have been dull and heavy ; but he was inwardly pleased. "It promises that success and happiness are to be ours at last," he thought. As the train sped past all the old familiar bridges and cuttings between London and his native town he grew happy and buoyant. He was longing for the panacea of all ills, the sympathy of a home. "Lily and I will keep open house," he said delightedly, "and she will make a lovely hostess."

CHAPTER XXXIV

DRAWING NEARER

“Nay, don’t lose heart ; great men and mighty nations have learned a great deal when they practise patience”

LILY was transfigured. As the next few days passed she rapidly gained strength. She took more interest in her child, and her pride was boundless. At first she had been gentle to it, but no satisfaction had been derived from its contemplation. Now she fondled it always, and her face glowed with new love as she bent over his cot. Mrs. Wrigley found her humming a scrap of a Liberian lullaby as she sat by the side of his cradle :—

*“ Down de lonely valley dat we older folk call sleep,
Go ma honey—go ma baby ;
Over de big boulders let yer li’l black legs creep,
Till de morn—go ma baby.
Byo, byo, li’l baby boy
Byo, ma baby,
Oh, I’ll kiss yer li’l peepers,
As dey close and keep yo’ safe,
Mammy’s li’l baby boy.”*

The words in the quaint negro dialect came from the girl’s lips with charming freshness.

“Why, what nonsense are you singing, Lily?”

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cried the matron, her face radiant with delight. "That letter seems to have done you more good than all the medicines in the world. I have brought you some soup. And you must sleep for a while. There will be another steamer in to-morrow, and I want you to be ready for good news. When the doctor returns homeward-bound, we must ask him to take you with him."

But Lily did not sleep. The baby nestled close to her, and she listened to the sound of the sea with all the old interest and satisfaction. The kruboyes were noisily putting a boat into the water, and their clear cries carried jovially to her over the yard and beach between. The sky was bright, and the trees rustled pleasantly as the wind shook their feathery heads. A pepper-bird was calling to its mate, "Coo-oo, coo-oo-a." Frank would be home in Manchester now, she did not doubt, with Christmas—hot in Liberia, cold in England—near at hand. Six weeks off! There would be just time enough to go to him.

The happiness of Lily made itself felt throughout the house. Maggie was now a mother, and Jack Summerton talked endlessly of his little daughter. The young couple, so completely happy themselves, had watched Lily's misery in great commiseration. Now they smiled upon her and encouraged her all they could. Mrs. Wrigley recovered her wonted pleasure in the discharge of her household duties, and the agent looked less harassed and worried. The young Englishman had sinned greatly, but Lily desired to be in his presence, and she must have her way. Wrigley did not know whether their stay in England was

Drawing Nearer

meant to be permanent, but he mentally promised to make the young people happy if they returned to Liberia at any time.

Frank's cable arrived, and stilled all questionings. Lily was to stay in England. The doctor returned a week later, and Mrs. Wrigley met him with an exalted countenance. "You won't need to give Mrs. Benson any more medicine," she said positively.

"What! Has her husband returned? He was not dead?"

"He has not come back. But she is going to him. It was the long absence from her husband that was sapping all her vitality. He cables that his love is unchanged, and I am sure that Lily's never faltered. So why shouldn't she go to him—and by your steamer, too?"

The doctor smiled incredulously. "The young lady was at a very low ebb a month ago. It will need a long recuperation of her strength before she is able to travel."

But Mrs. Wrigley would not be denied. "There are more medicines in the world than those contained in doctors' chests and chemists' laboratories. The mind is superior to the body. Come and see."

Being a man of many years' experience of the West Coast, and ever conscious of its enervating tendencies, he was quite unprepared for the improvement that had taken place since last he saw Lily. When they entered she was bending over the cradle, her nightdress falling around her, and a slight flush on her face. She turned her head and went on humming to the child, "Mammy's li'l baby boy."

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It was with an expression of astonishment that the doctor looked at her, and this grew more animated as he took up the baby. "Why, the change even extends to the youngster!" he exclaimed. "I've known your face for many years, Mrs. Benson. I remember seeing you in your father's house a long, long time ago. You look more like your natural self than I have beheld you since your marriage."

"May I go with you?"

"Yes, you may make the voyage. The only antidote to your sickness was desire to live and an optimistic view of the future. You have obtained both these in my absence, and I think I shall ask Wrigley to pay his wife my fees."

"And I may actually go with you to-morrow? Even that length of time seems too long. Won't the boat sail to-night?"

Lily laughed merrily at her audacity, and to the listeners in the dining-room as well as the bedroom it was the sweetest of hearing. "I shall get up to-day properly and have my breakfast in the dining-room. Tell the boys to lay my plate, will you, dear?" Mrs. Wrigley looked at the doctor interrogatively.

"I think we may concede that. You have worked such a wonderful cure, Mrs. Wrigley, that I feel my earlier judgment to be vitiated."

The girl rose and kissed the matron enthusiastically.

"No one knows what a witch she is. We shall have the natives trying their fetish on her soon."

The doctor returned to the steamer in one of the firm's boats. Mrs. Wrigley's eyes were beaming.

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She helped Lily from her room, and after a few faltering steps the girl stood on the piazza, supporting herself by the rail.

“What a pretty place Bassa is! Look at those sails touched by the sun, and see the foam on the rocks. I had almost entirely overlooked the sea. Oh! those weary weeks in bed, waiting, waiting. Yonder are the sheds. And my little garden is not quite bare. Let me go down to-night.”

“The stairs are perilous, child. But perhaps we can manage it together.”

So it was that Lily descended to the yard and the beach. She sat down on a garden seat among her flowers, and found an ingenuous element of newness in things that had once been over-familiar.

When at last she returned to her easy-chair on the piazza she realised her weakness.

“But I need not do anything on the steamer. I have a full three weeks in which to prepare for the meeting.”

In asserting that the mind is stronger than the body Mrs. Wrigley had only expressed a truth which everyone who has experienced illness and pain will readily grant. But Lily's vivacity that night was unusual. She seemed to be making prodigious efforts to recover. The weak frame mutinied, and she was prostrate when Mrs. Wrigley led her to her room at nine o'clock. So that the kind-hearted woman broached a proposal to her husband in the privacy of their room a little later. At first the agent refused, and then his affection for the girl conquered, and he agreed. “Don't stay too long, mother. There is plenty of worry

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in the business now, especially since Benson left us, and I need your sustaining presence."

Early the next morning Lily had her chair cushioned, and sat out in the open air. Maggie and Jack came to say "Good-bye," and the young negro openly showed his regret at the parting. "We were such friends in the old days, Lily," he said. "But you are looking much better, and when you are a great man's wife yonder you must write to me regularly."

Lily took her cousin's baby from the arms of Maggie.

"What a fine little girl she is! Mine is asleep in his cot."

"It is indeed true!" cried Mrs. Wrigley. "For the first month after its birth it was a delicate, tiny thing, always puking and crying. But now he puts even your little one to shame. Shall I bring him to you?"

Lily sat with the two little ones on her knees. Maggie's child was almost black, with curls of glossy wool. Lily's looked purely English, and his hair was of a golden brown. They stood gazing at the children in an attitude of silent veneration. Thus do we all worship at the shrine of innocence and love.

"Frank is his father over again," said Maggie. "Look at the hair and the firm set of the mouth."

"He is very like himself, to me. I wouldn't change one of his features for a thousand pounds." She laughed and looked cheerfully at them.

"Lily, I am going with you," said Mrs. Wrigley suddenly. "You are not so strong as you think, and Ralph agrees that the voyage will do me good."

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The girl smiled delightedly, and they drifted into talk of many things, past and present, dear to them all.

After this declaration of Mrs. Wrigley's, there was little hesitancy in the preparation of their trunks. True, Lily had still a look of delicacy, but her young beauty was enhanced by her frailness, and her eyes gazed out bravely upon the future. Her face was pale, but there was now no sickliness in its colour. "To think that I wasted the summer in bed!" she cried in derision.

The remainder of that last day in Bassa was spent in completing the wardrobe of the baby, and in making such alterations in the dresses of Lily as suggested themselves to Mrs. Wrigley.

The captain arrived for them early in the afternoon, and Mr. Wrigley accompanied them to the steamer. There were sincere words of parting, and the captain moved from his anchorage in the dimness of the approaching night. The agent had suggested that they should cable their return immediately they touched Freetown, Sierra Leone. But Lily demurred at this as she sat with Mrs. Wrigley on the upper deck. "Frank must see me unexpectedly," she said. "I will write to him from Liverpool, and ask him to meet the train upon its arrival in Manchester."

The steamer reached the Prince's stage in the course of three weeks. It was not in one of the most imposing streets in Liverpool that they had halted, but Lily felt that its appearance of rest would serve to bring her nearer to the life for which she was longing.

After she had retired to her room that night and

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her letter to Frank had been despatched, she found it impossible to rest. Ever the thought that she was to see her husband on the morrow persisted in her mind. Mrs. Wrigley came in quietly.

“Are you asleep, Lily?” she asked.

“I cannot sleep. But I am very tired, all the same.”

“It has been a long passage, I know. However, it is over at last.”

“Yes. We have reached the end of our journey almost. I hope Frank is well, and won't be disturbed by our unexpected arrival.”

“Don't fear, child. You may be sure that he will be waiting for you long before the train reaches the station. Good night. Try to sleep, for you will have a long day to-morrow.”

It was the early dawn before she slept, but the quiet watching through the hours of the night had given her a great peace.

CHAPTER XXXV

HOME AT LAST

“A brave old house ! a garden full of bees,
Large dropping poppies and green hollyhocks,
With butterflies for crowns,—tree peonies,
And pinks, and goldylocks.”

THE faculty of retaining a knowledge of past events is frequently a source of neither purple moments of rapture nor hours of thronging delight. Memory is ever a capricious maiden, releasing the golden dust and greedily retaining her grasp of the dross. For when we indulge in retrospect we are surprised to find how small and insignificant are the accidents that make up the variegated tissue of our lives. A flower, dried, faded, pressed sentimentally between the leaves of our favourite Shelley, brings before our mental vision—not a picture of this token worn at the throat on a bright spring day—of one beloved who is now, alas ! beyond the bourn : a dream of passion, of blood, and of tears. What we see is the dress she wore, the lace at her wrists ; and we turn to compare the actual woman at our side with the ideal girl of the might-have-been.

Frank Benson's walk to the railway station that morning marked the turning-point of his life.

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He felt himself to be no longer an apprentice, clumsy, inept in the ways of love. Whatever he had lacked of worldly wisdom was now acquired ; whatever he had possessed in surfeit of false sentimentality was now eliminated. These changes had come upon him suddenly, but he knew that during his two years' probation he had been labouring leisurely but painfully upon his temperament. He had lived his books rather than operated upon them with the old earnestness of the mere artist in words. Not that he could have indicated any remarkable degree of progress. But the change was there—internal, positive, psychological.

He did not yet feel absolved from repentance. Had he made better use of his opportunities he might have had many months of ideal happiness behind him. And Lily had been living, he felt, in a confident knowledge that the victory was inexorably hers, while he, poor fool, had been intent upon watching the development of a rash experiment, the revelations of a mind harassed. Oh, the madness of his actions ! He felt that she was now to be presented to him in a newer light ; that she had been serenely triumphant all the time, while he had been grovelling in the dust at her feet. That she belonged to him he could not doubt ; but she belonged also to the simple, the noble in life. He had been compelled to rise in order that he might take his place at her side.

They clasped hands on the platform as though they had parted yesterday. But there was a glorious light shining in the depths of her eyes. He took his child in his arms, and bent over it with a sob that threatened to choke him. Mrs.

Home at Last

Wrigley hovered in the background, tearful, sympathetic.

“I am with Lily.”

“I am again with Frank.”

“Our little one, our little one.”

As she walked by his side, along the less-frequented ways, it came to him again and again, as a wonderful disclosure, that she belonged to him. Every other woman on the street appeared in comparison insignificant. Her words carried in them the old sweet confidence. They were neither an enigmatical screen for epigram, nor a rush of vacuities. He was admitted within her thoughts, and under the calm of her loving presence he forgot the burning expressions of regret that had been lingering on his tongue. He was at peace. She was his. Let that suffice.

When they arrived at length within the porch of their home, he had grown to look upon her as the one essential element in his life. She was a woman, exalting and uplifting him by her goodness.

The maturity of Frank Benson's work has been wondered at by his readers, but the reason is not far to seek. Whatever his hand performs is tested by the memory of his desertion of the dearest girl in the world. All women are, by reason of those bitter experiences, open to the probing instruments of his genius. He has described and modelled them with the intensity of feeling unalienable from suffering: keen, poignant, unforgettable.

But he is happy at last. Little Frank lies crowing in his crib. The author of *Musings* sits at his writing-table, busy with his proofs.

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Says Lily, as she leans over towards him from the cradle-side—

“Do you know that you are one of the most conceited of mortals, Frank Benson?” Her eyes sparkle with fun, and she nods her head pleasantly as he looks at her inquiringly.

He knows there is a great deal of truth in her words, and winces a little. For a minute he does not speak, then a smile creeps over his mouth, and he says—

“I have very little to be conceited about, Lily—except my wife.”

“And your child,” she retorts merrily.

For reply he leans over and kisses her. And he is indeed one of the proudest of mankind as he lays down his pen to take their little one in his arms.

THE END

POSTSCRIPT

LIBERIA, the principal scene of this story, lies immediately below Sierra Leone, on the West Coast of Africa. It is situated between $4^{\circ} 20'$ and $7^{\circ} 20'$ north latitude, and is the only negro republic, properly so called, in Africa. It was originally established in 1822 as a home for the freed slaves of America. At the onset, however, the United States Government disclaimed any responsibility in the working of the state. While assuring the negroes that it was willing to offer them the assistance of its good offices in preventing any oppression on the part of neighbouring colonies, the then Secretary of State, Mr. Upsher, said: "Their authorities are responsible for their own acts, and they certainly cannot expect the support and countenance of this Government in any act of injustice towards individuals or nations. But as they are themselves nearly powerless, they may rely, for the protection of their rights, upon the justice and sympathy of other powers."

The American Colonisation Society bought the first piece of land from the blacks, and the capital city of the Republic, Monrovia, is built upon it. There cannot possibly be a more heroic portion of human history than that which recounts the troubles of this first little band of colonists on Cape Montserrado. Under the gallant generalship of a white man named Ashmun the thirty-five freed slaves held back the furious assaults of fifteen hundred savages.

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The scenes of bloodshed that characterised the earliest efforts of the American negroes have never been adequately described ; but I am presently working upon another novel which will, I hope, elucidate the many curious psychological problems of negro emancipation with which civilised man to-day is confronted in Africa. During the years that I have spent in the Republic I have talked with veterans who remember these stirring times, and such a story should meet with a good reception. The aborigines were—and are to-day in many portions of the country—grossly superstitious, and resisted the control of their black-skinned brothers with great pertinacity. This part of the coast was one of the most lucrative centres of the slave trade, and the coast tribes carried on a system of barter in the people of the interior. Spaniards seem to have been the worst white transgressors, and having no conception of the ethical wrong done to their fellow-creatures by selling their bodies, the Kru tribe made no hesitation in disposing of them at a good profit.

With the advent of Christian negroes from America the opposing forces of freedom and slavery, science and superstition, came face to face. Each succeeding year the Colonisation Society sent out further numbers of freed slaves, and as time went on the antagonism became more and more apparent. Bloody wars were constantly waging between the aborigines and the immigrants. But after twenty years' persevering effort the colonists were successful, and to-day there is peace within the borders of the Republic, a peace which has remained almost unbroken for a period of half a century.

During the earliest years of the colony there were many political grievances, and it was through the agency of these that the Government of the United States disclaimed any accountability for its operation. Great Britain openly sustained the claims of her traders, and the Colonisation

Postscript

Society, perhaps in alarm, advised the Liberian settlers to proclaim themselves as an independent state. This was done on the 26th day of July in the year 1847, and a republican form of government was planned, modelled upon that of the United States. From that date Liberia has been recognised as a sovereign state.

The problem of my story is, I believe, new. That a marriage between an Englishman and a negress may be uniformly happy is testified by the examples met with in America. But that the culture of the black girl may rise superior to that of an educated white man is hardly conceivable. However, the emotional senses of sympathy and incompatibility are carefully described in the story, and I have treated my plot as delicately as was possible. In studying the temperament of the negro races living in Northern Africa to the Western Windward it must be remembered that there have been higher types of civilisation in touch with them for many centuries. Indeed, quite apart from Arab culture, which has made itself strongly felt both in Sierra Leone and Liberia, the European nations have exercised great influence over the peoples of the coast. Thus it is that the Liberian, whether an immigrant or a native, is educated in an unique degree. But despite the civilisation realised upon the coastline, the native of the interior remains practically unchanged. We might compare the effect of these higher types to a garment with a bright fringe. Culture lines the extreme coast, but interiorward is the dull pattern of the past—unchanged, sable, unadorned.

The relationship between the Liberian and the European Governments is an interesting one. I cannot fail to recognise from long acquaintance with the negro that he is not without a certain innate dignity, and that he displays noble human traits under proper circumstances and a congenial environment.

Merely a Negress

Fiction must be amusing. But it is not amusing first and instructive afterwards. My novel deals with circumstance, which is the result of the period ; with character, which is the result of mental divergence ; with social life, which is the result of intercourse. Frank Benson is admittedly a prig—with qualities. Lily Summerton is an angel—with faults. If I have portrayed true types, I am well content. I do not ask my readers to admire unreservedly, and an occasional jar to their sensibilities would be only the end desired. In *Merely a Negress* I have endeavoured to capture the fascination of the Bush, and to convey to the mind of the reader a sense of the wild luxuriance and erratic climate of Liberia. I look forward to the verdict of my critics with interest.

Any white man who has travelled among the darker races of the earth cannot help but feel a thrill of exultation because of the devotion of the negro to our higher culture. Pre-eminently among other European races, Britain has incurred great responsibilities, and it is her duty, by the aid of the ethnologist and scientist, who has assiduously studied his traits, to endeavour, without bias, to understand him. If my novel should accomplish a little in this direction I shall feel amply repaid for my labours.

STUART YOUNG

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